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ABSTRACT

This book contains five essays that recount the story of Britain's Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in particular and adult education in general in Cornwall since 1919. "An Idea Moves West: The Days before 1919" (Bernard Deacon) discusses the birth of the movement. The problems of chronically high unemployment, low wages, and emigration that faced potential adult education organizers in Cornwall in the early 1900s are shown to reappear following World War I. "The Inter War Years: Making It Work 1920-38" (Bernard Deacon) continues to place the early days of the WEA in the wider social fabric of the time. It describes economic problems leading to the need for financial backing from Carnegie Trust funds; the WEA from 1929-33; and the ability of the WEA to hold on in the 1930s despite the economic situation. Other aspects of the WEA discussed include class offerings, tutors, students, geographical constraints, the branches, and campaigning for education. "The Troubled Years: 1939-1953" (Gordon McCallum) focuses on the role of WEA during the war years, post-war growth, university relationships, rumors of independence, and damage limitation. "Calm after the Storm: 1954-1969" (Gordon McCallum) discusses other crises of policy and administrators, such as Oxford linkages, Summer and Weekend Schools, and the Development Scheme, which offered sample courses. "New Faces, New Themes: 1970-1989" (John Hurst) widens the context to place the WEA within adult education as a whole. (YLB)

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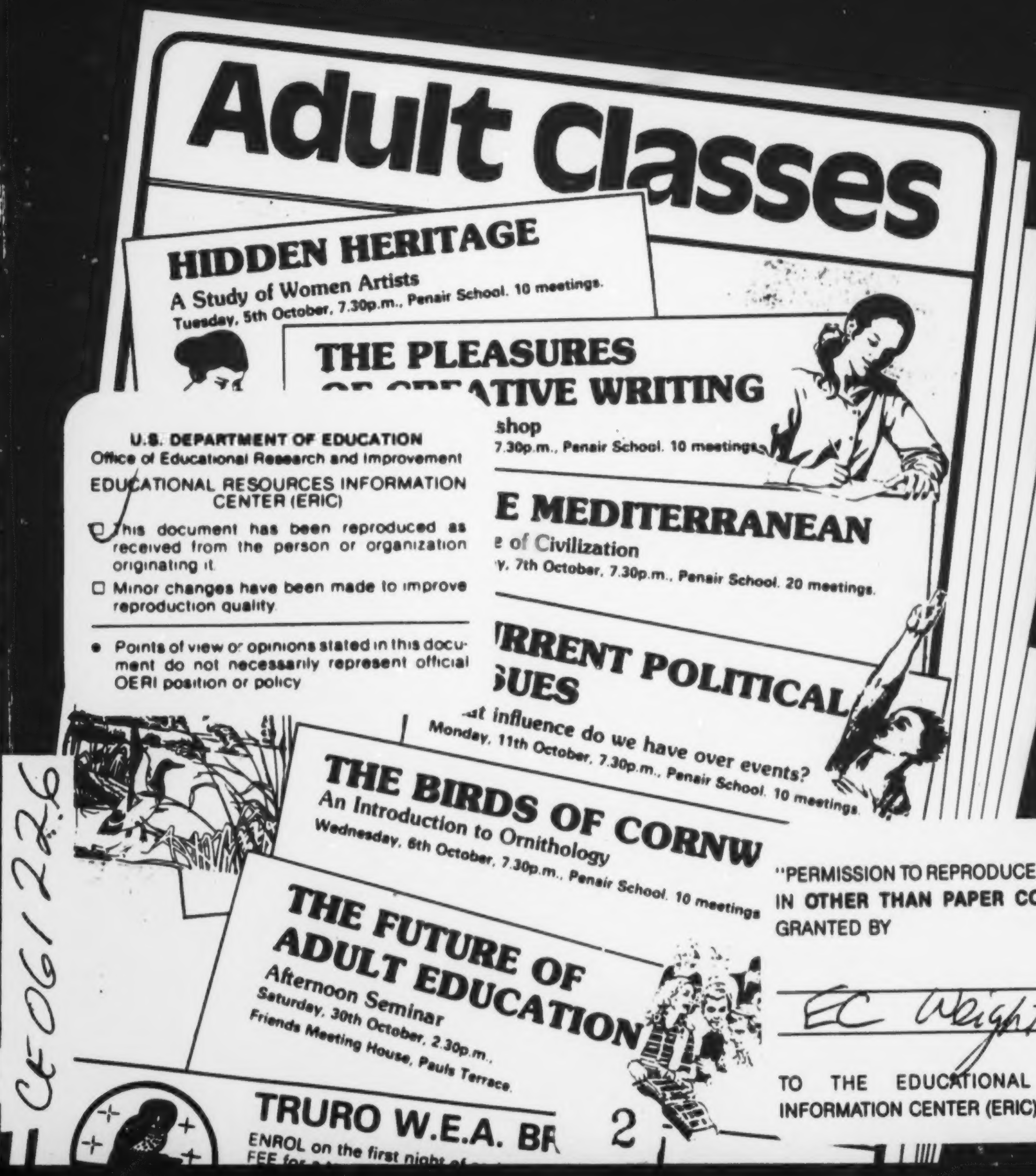
# A STORY OF ADULT EDUCATION IN CORNWALL

## *70 years of the W.E.A.*

Edited by Gordon McCallum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HIDDEN HERITAGE
A Study of Women Artists
Tuesday, 5th October, 7.30p.m., Penair School. 10 meetings.
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ATIVE WRITING
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URRENT POLITICAL
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Monday, 11th October, 7.30p.m., Penair School. 10 meetings.
THE BIRDS OF CORNW
An Introduction to Ornithology
Wednesday, 6th October, 7.30p.m., Penair School. 10 meetings
THE FUTURE OF ADULT EDUCATION
Afternoon Seminar
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Friends Meeting House, Pauls Terrace.
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# A STORY OF ADULT EDUCATION

## SEVENTY YEARS OF THE WEA

EDITED BY GORDON McCALLUM, MA

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO ALL PAST, PRESENT
AND FUTURE
WEA STUDENTS
IN CORNWALL

*Unemployed students at WEA summer camp, Gwithian*

**A STORY OF ADULT EDUCATION IN CORNWALL contains five essays which recount the fascinating story of the WEA in particular and adult education in general in Cornwall since 1919.**

**The authors are three men with personal involvement and experience of the modern WEA.**

- **Gordon McCallum, MA** has been the Tutor Organiser of the WEA in Cornwall since 1970

- **John Hurst, MA** was the Senior Tutor for Exeter University's Extra Mural Department for almost twenty years from 1970 and is still a practising and highly regarded literature tutor

- **Bernard Deacon, MA** has taught classes for the WEA up and down Cornwall since 1982 and is heavily involved in the Open University locally. At various times he has been Chairman of the Camborne Branch and of the County Federation of WEA Branches

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*Sven Berlin, artist and WEA tutor: self portrait with hat, 1952*

# FOREWORD

Those of us 'in the know', as they say - the organisers, students, secretaries and tutors who performed, and still perform, on this little Cornish stage - have been awaiting this book for a considerable time. The privileged few, like myself, who have read it will certainly not have been disappointed.

The authors have digested a multitude of facts, in contemporary official reports and from such unlikely ingredients have produced a most savoury omelette. The metaphor is apt; this is no mere 'olla podrida' but, to continue the culinary imagery, a most nourishing bone broth. Yet nearer the truth, and by the nature of this history, these are truly the 'bones' of the subject - you might say the osteology of it. As in archaeology, so here, the *bones* are the safest evidence of the living past. Isaiah asked "Can these bones live?"; as nearly as possible the authors have made them to do so.

Of course there is more than this to a history. As I am sure the authors would agree, history as written, is not the same as the vividity of living at that time, engaged in such a work and labouring in such a company. Besides the 'bones', if we are to understand such a history, we must consult the heart, but that organ has its seasons we are told, and yesterday's heart-beats are today's murmurs.

Cornwall is different, the authors tell us; that is very true, but just how individual and how piquant that difference was can scarcely be appreciated today.

Earnest Green, writing in 1953, quotes the views of an Exeter class: "The general reason for an initial interest in adult education was a consciousness of cultural deficiency. This appeared at no particular age but at a time one-time pleasures lost their charm and there was felt a sense of something lacking. Often it arose through or after personal contacts with cultured people or through the impersonal contracts of the radio." How true that was of our class and branch members in Cornwall - as much for the graduates from grammar schools as for shopkeepers, roadmen and all those others who gave us of their time and experience and wisdom.

Well, I won't keep you chatting like this. Be sure, when you read this work, that if you were known to me, I shall be thinking of you; and you, I'm sure, will still glimpse a coloured scene or two from those bygone years even today when that "hue is not the wear". If you are fortunate enough still to know any of our old "comrades of the dusty day" who came to those classes, do discuss this history with them. Mere nostalgia? Not at all; it is to take part in a sacrament of remembrance for fine things finished - for good things passed away. Here are the facts of the history of the times and always the discussion of the facts was a valued part of our classes.

**Frank A. Turk, Ph.D.**

# PREFACE

For a number of years I have felt that the history of the WEA in Cornwall was worth recording. At various times it seemed likely to happen and then some problem would arise. In the end it seemed nothing would happen unless compromises were made.

The first compromise was to share responsibility for telling the story. Bernard Deacon agreed to write the first two chapters covering the ground up to the Second World War. He has discovered some interesting material and has used his knowledge of Cornwall and his historian's skills to place the early days of the WEA in the wider social fabric of the time.

The second two chapters fell to the Editor. This was a difficult period to write about, with a number of crises of policy and administration. These had to be recorded, and I hope, some sense has been made of these troubled years. As far as possible I have tried to allow tutors and students from that time to speak for themselves and I am certain that they provide the most valuable and lasting impression of that time.

John Hurst wrote the last chapter and has again widened the context to place the WEA in adult education as a whole. The recent past shows the WEA now a very much junior partner in the provision of adult education, but a junior partner with a long and honourable past.

The second compromise was to recognise that we could not produce a definitive history and that it was better to try and tell a story. This has meant that much has been missed out and many events and people are either scarcely mentioned or entirely ignored. Our selection is based on what evidence we could discover and our judgement as to what was relevant. We hope that anyone who has been ignored will forgive us. We are fully aware that much of the success of the WEA has been baseed on the unrecorded efforts of a myriad of voluntary workers.

As Editor, I would like to thank both my co-contributors for the time and energy they have allocated from their busy lives to help produce this book. I would like also to record my thanks to all those who have helped with old minute books, photographs, and reminiscinces of the past.

It fell to my wife to make sense of the various drafts produced for her and to produce the final manuscript. Her remark that "some people change tenses as often as they change key when they are singing" gives some idea of the problems she faced.

**Gordon McCallum, MA, Editor**

# CHAPTER ONE: AN IDEA MOVES WEST: THE DAYS BEFORE 1919

BERNARD DEACON

In 1919, when the new South Western District of the Workers' Educational Association was established, there was just one branch of the WEA already in existence in Cornwall - at Truro. This had been set up following a public meeting at the Town Hall in late November, 1918, just after the 'war to end all wars' had ended. The meeting faithfully reflected the classic aim of the early WEA pioneers, a coalition between the universities, traditional custodians of the dominant culture, and workers' organisations. The Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall, J.C.Williams, was in the chair, supported by Professor Morgan of University College, Exeter, various representatives of local Trades Councils and trades unions and W.R.Straker, the organising secretary of the Western District of the WEA based on Bristol.

Professor Morgan set out the WEA's "great ideals":

"It was the idealistic side of the workers' movement that had produced the WEA and a finer flower labour had never produced. It was rumoured that Cornish folk were hard headed and practical people, and knew the right side of things. Therefore could anybody believe that a movement with such ideals would fail to find some response in a place like Truro? ... (The WEA) ... wanted to make people more capable of the duties of citizenship". [West Briton, 2/12/18]

W.R.Straker summed up the WEA's position - "unsectarian, democratic and non-political, ... formed for the purpose of stimulating, expressing and supplying the popular demand for education". The WEA had arrived.

### The birth of the movement

However, the origins of the WEA lie well outside Cornwall. It was in the last quarter of the 19th century that the universities began to interest themselves in education outside their own walls. The University Extension Movement, stimulated both by a growing social concern for underprivileged groups and by desires to educate the 'new democracy' produced by the extension of the franchise, originated in Cambridge in 1873 and resulted in the provision of lecture courses by university tutors in various towns and cities across Britain.

It was soon realised, however, that, like many other experiments in adult education during the 19th century, these lectures were not reaching the working class. Partly because of this realisation, and partly because the extension lectures in their original format - where experts descended to dispense wisdom to the masses - gave little opportunity for extended study, by the end of the century voices were heard demanding that the 'common heritage' of liberal education should be made more accessible.

Prominent among these voices was a Co-operative Society clerk in East London, Albert Mansbridge.

Mansbridge had been a student at Toynbee Hall, the university settlement there, and became enthused by a passion for education. He shared the liberal assumptions of John Stuart Mill that knowledge - of almost any kind - was essential if individuals were to take their full place in society. He also had a touching faith in the universities, as repositories of that knowledge denied to the working class by the sheer pressures of earning a living and by the absence of free and open secondary education.

Mansbridge began to pressurise the workers' own organisations to demand university education for all at the same time as appealing to the universities to reach out to the workers. His pleas did not fall on deaf ears. In 1903 at Oxford, a conference of representatives of Co-operative Societies, trade unions and university bodies founded the National Association for Promoting the Higher Education of Working Men. This rather ponderous title soon gave way, in 1905, to the shorter (and less sexist) Workers' Educational Association. Local committees with representatives of the relevant university extension centre, the Co-op and 'working class organisations of standing' were formed to undertake propaganda and arrange meetings and lectures.

By 1907, this had resulted in a new kind of educational venture - the tutorial class. Instead of a one-dimensional lecture format to groups of up to one hundred passive consumers, smaller classes of no more than 30 students would discuss the lectures with the lecturer and complete written work in a course of study mirroring the university year. The first tutorial classes were led by R.H.Tawney who taught economic history to groups of WEA students at Longton in the Potteries and Rochdale in Lancashire. The new body struck a responsive chord, especially among those workers who, like Mansbridge, were imbued with the Victorian ideal of 'self-help'. By 1913/14, 145 tutorial classes were being held at various places across the length and breadth of the country, involving over 3,200 students [Blyth, English University Adult Education, p. 13]. Although arts subjects like literature and philosophy were on offer, the great majority of classes were in social history, economic history and economics, subjects reflecting the more bread and butter concerns of the potential student body. Yet WEA classes did not emerge in Cornwall before 1914. Why was this?

## The Cornish context

Cornwall had certain special difficulties which made it, in hindsight, infertile territory for the early missionaries of the WEA. At first sight, Cornish society before 1914 had certain affinities with North Staffordshire and Lancashire, but there were also fundamental contrasts. It was industrial in parts, yet not urban; predominantly working class, yet Methodist and individualist; with tightly knit communities but little history of labour organisation; radical in its politics, yet Liberal rather than Labour.

To understand the difficulties the early WEA faced in Cornwall, we have to understand the nature of Cornish society. A combination of economic, political and cultural factors meant that demands for WEA type classes were slow to emerge. The single, basic factor was the weakness of organised labour. In 1892 Beatrice and

Sidney Webb, in their comprehensive study of trade unionism, discovered very few trade unionists in Cornwall, (although the same source tells us that the number of industrial disputes per worker was higher in Cornwall than in South and East England and the Midlands). For example, attempts to form a miners' union had been made in 1866, 1873-74 and in 1887, but they all failed. Mining, the dominant industry into the Edwardian era, remained non-unionised, and only relatively small groups of workers organised themselves before 1910, such as the stonemasons of the Penryn area. It wasn't until the eve of the First World War that trade unions began to make some inroads into the Cornish workforce. The national railway strike of 1911 alerted many workers, and not just on the railway, to their potential strength. Within the Great Western Railway itself, NUR membership soared. For example, there was almost 100% NUR membership at Falmouth by late 1913, whereas it had been "almost nil in 1911". Clay workers and dockers were also stirring themselves in this period, aided by Workers' Union organisers from up-country. Although the clay workers' strike in 1913 ended in defeat, it set a solid foundation for the growth of the Workers' Union in mid-Cornwall. Nevertheless, trade unions had shallow roots in Cornish society.

It was a similar story with the Co-operative movement. Co-operative Societies were the backbone of the infant WEA in many areas, such as Lancashire. True, by 1914 there was a network of Co-operative stores in Cornwall, but these lacked the campaigning edge of the organisation in Northern England and they enjoyed only a marginal place in Cornish communities.

Politically, the labour movement in Cornwall could not escape the long shadow of Liberalism, which locally, especially after the 1880's, had a strongly radical and proletarian appearance. Whereas the mining division of Camborne-Redruth had returned C.A.V. Conybeare (reputedly the most radical member of Parliament of the time) from 1885 to 1895, a candidate for the Social Democratic Federation, an early socialist party, only won a fairly feeble 109 votes (1.5%) in 1906 and was buried by the Liberal landslide of that year. Apart from some SDF activity in the early 1890's and early 1900's centred on Truro and West Cornwall, Cornwall remained a desert for labour politics. Its workers on the whole remained loyal to radical Liberalism, or even, of course, voted Conservative.

The relative weakness of the labour movement in Edwardian Cornwall is fairly easy to describe, but how can we explain it? It used to be seriously argued that Cornish workers were somehow congenitally disinclined to trade unionism, either because they were stubborn individualists, romantic and deep Celts, or just too sensible! However, recent research has effectively dismissed this in favour of a more complex explanation. The view of the Cornish worker as a heroic individualist, untainted by labour organisations, fails to pursue the Cornish emigrants overseas. There, in South Australia, on the Rand, in the western states of the USA, the Cornish played prominent roles in founding mining unions, at the same time as they were non-unionised in Cornwall itself. They were also active in Labour Party politics in

Australia. So, how do we explain the weakness of the labour movement in Cornwall itself?

The reasons were both cultural and economic. Culturally, the chapel had been dominant in the 19th century. Methodism was the religion of the mass of the people and had deeply penetrated the fabric of life, especially village life. Of course, there's nothing to prevent good Methodists becoming active trade unionists, as happened in Yorkshire, South Wales or the North East of England, but Cornish Methodism had a negative effect in two ways. First both employers, or their representatives, and employees tended to worship in the same chapels. For example, the miner at Dolcoath mine would be likely to see his mine captain in the pulpit of Camborne Wesleyan Chapel on a Sunday and be applying to him for a pitch in the mine on the Monday. In contrast to Wales, where the much more visible mine owners tended to be Anglican (as well as English), this had the effect of blurring class lines. Secondly, Methodism offered an alternative path to community leadership for the intelligent and ambitious working man as well as providing a ready made social life for the working woman. Energies would be devoted to the chapel, which gave little opportunity or time for trade union organisations, even had other conditions been favourable. Furthermore, unlike the North East, Methodism in Cornwall was predominantly Wesleyan and Bible Christian. These sects were far less likely to produce labour leaders than the Primitive Methodists, which schooled a disproportionately high number of activists in the North of England.

However, more important than the role of Methodism, whose hold was in any case weakening dramatically after the 1870s, was the peculiar economic history of Cornwall since the 1860s. In the mid-nineteenth century Cornwall had been a mining region par excellence. Over 30,000 men, women and children, a third of the labour force, worked in its tin, copper and lead mines. But then, in the 1860's and 1870's, the world price of these metals collapsed, plummeting Cornwall into deep recession. Despite recurrent false dawns the story of Cornish mining after 1874 was one of steady retraction. By 1901 there were less than 10,000 employed by the mines and by 1913 this had shrunk even further.

While the mining industry lurched from one crisis to the next, a large part of the engineering industry associated with it also succumbed. Hayle Foundry, Perran Foundry and St. Blazey Foundry were among the most prominent casualties of the 40 years of economic depression. Only Holmans at Camborne, employing just a dozen workers in 1881, weathered the storm by switching to cater for an overseas market. But, apart from Holmans and a temporary boom (in both senses of the word) in the explosives industry at Hayle, little emerged to fill the gap left by the contraction of mining in West Cornwall before 1914. Mid-Cornwall was somewhat different, because here the clay industry enjoyed a steady expansion from the 1870s. But it still employed fewer workers in 1910 than the local tin and copper miners had shed since the 1860s. Outside the industrial areas, fishing, which had enjoyed good times in the late 19th century, also entered into depression after 1900, as local boat owners were unable or unwilling to compete with the new technology introduced by East Coast and Brixham fishermen.

This prolonged economic recession had two effects on labour organisation. First, it meant low wages and a constant and justifiable fear of being laid off. This was unsure ground for permanent trade unionism, based as it was on regular subscription payments. Second, and more important, it meant that the Cornish population became more mobile, not in the sense of the number of times they moved but in the distance they moved. Fired by that dominant Methodist ideology of individual self-help, miners and others were quick to solve their individual difficulties by moving to areas of higher wages or more employment. Skilled and better paid workers in their 20s and 30s were more likely to move, and this removed the very group of people who were most active in building trade unions (and, incidentally, in demanding adult education) elsewhere.

The result is well known. As an example, the local press in 1909 reported an enthusiastic gathering of 300 Cornish people for a pasty and saffron cake supper. Nothing unusual in that - except that it took place in Chicago! [West Briton 21/1/09] Because of the dominant role of mining in Cornwall, movement in search of work had effectively meant movement overseas. At least 150,000 folk left Cornwall to settle permanently in North America, Australia and South Africa and another 110,000 moved to England and Wales. Moreover, this greatly underestimates the total amount of movement as many went and later returned. The Report on the Health of Cornish Miners in 1904 found that, of all the miners dying in Camborne-Redruth in 1900-02, 64% had worked abroad (the majority in South Africa or in North America). While this probably overestimates the mobility - as miners on the Rand had a notoriously short life expectancy - it reinforces the point that the Cornish had become one of the most mobile peoples in Western Europe, along with the Irish, Scots Highlanders and Southern Italians.

All this frenetic coming and going again posed difficulties for permanent labour organisation, as well as resulting in a loss of population (the Cornish population fell from over 360,000 in 1861 to 322,000 in 1901). Indeed, Gill Burke has convincingly argued that the labour history of Cornish miners can only be understood in the context of an international labour market which in turn reflected shifts in international investment and development. The existence of "an established habit of migration provided an escape route during a period of change within the home industry where otherwise the development of clear class antagonisms might have been expected to occur" [Burke, in Marks and Richardson (eds). International labour migration: historical perspectives, 1984, pp.57-75].

We mustn't forget, as well, the existence of that parallel stream of middle class emigration - this time towards the large English cities of London and Bristol rather than overseas. This also had its repercussions for adult education in Cornwall, again removing potential students as well as organisers.

## Cornwall and University Extensions

If we add to the above factors the geographical difficulties posed by Cornwall's dispersed rural settlement pattern, with no single, central large population centre, and its distance from the Universities, we can begin to appreciate the problems facing potential Adult Education organisers in Edwardian Cornwall. Incidentally, this last point, the distance from a university, had already led to proposals for a Cornish University. The Reverend Lach Szyrma had called for this as early as the 1890s, and an editorial in the West Briton discussed it in 1905, although, following a talk by Q (the Cornish writer, Quiller-Couch) to some Redruth students, concluded that the "time was not ripe" [West Briton, 5/1/05]. (85 years later, we could be forgiven for wondering if the time will ever be 'ripe'),

The distance from the universities, the prevailing low wages and the difficulty of organising lecture courses in the small Cornish towns resulted in the collapse of university extension classes in Cornwall. Extension classes, as mentioned above, were the first examples of extra mural studies. They usually involved six to eight week lecture courses provided by a university teacher. It was Oxford University that came to Cornwall in 1886, providing lectures on "The making and division of wealth" at Camborne, Redruth, Falmouth and Truro. In 1889, a Central Committee for Cornwall was established to extend the work, and local centres emerged in the above four towns as well as St. Austell and Penzance. By the early 1890s, Helston, Launceston and Bodmin had joined the towns hosting classes. The height of the Extension movement in Cornwall occurred in 1894/95 (just before a serious crash in tin prices) when courses took place in all nine towns on the subject of "South Africa", by then the most popular destination for emigrants. However, "exhausted by the effort and the financial strain both the central and the local committees were dissolved" [Welch, Devon and Cornwall Notes and Quarterly, 1978, pp 19-22] and, apart from courses at Falmouth and Truro in 1899, Oxford University retired from the field. Desultory attempts by Cambridge University to establish some extension education in Cornwall after 1905 were even less successful. The reasons for the overall failure were clearly financial. High travelling expenses for tutors combined with low wages for students to ensure that fees only covered around a quarter of the cost of lectures. The rest had to be found from local benefactors or local councils, neither of which were particularly forthcoming.

## Adult Education in Edwardian Cornwall

The combination of economic depression, scattered settlements, poverty and mobility meant that autonomous demands for adult education were inevitably bound to be slow to appear. The same factors meant that, even had this demand appeared, it would have been difficult to meet. Nevertheless, the failure of university extension in Cornwall and the non-appearance of a locally based WEA before 1914 did not mean that there was no adult education. On the contrary, there were a number of bodies providing various sorts of what could loosely be termed education for adults. But these were leftovers from the 19th century, either catering primarily for the middle class or attempts by the local gentry and professional classes to bring education to the working class.

Literary Societies had been the jewels in the crown of early Victorian self-help. In their early days they had a clear educational function, running libraries and organising lectures, although they tended to appeal mainly to the better off; professional people, clerks and shopkeepers with a smattering of skilled craftsmen. By the Edwardian era the Literary Societies were in decay. At Camborne Literary Institution, in the 1890s "the main interest in the prime objective of the pioneers showed distinct signs of decline. There came the introduction of the billiard table with all its attractions" [J.F.Odgers, Camborne Public (Free) Library 1895-1963, Camborne, 1963]. By 1907, membership was falling, debts were rising and general apathy was being complained of. By this time, in addition, the libraries of the Institutions were hived off to the new publicly funded free libraries, most of these in Cornwall being donated by J.Passmore Edwards, the Cornish philanthropist, in the 1890s.

While the educational contribution of the Literary Societies had declined from its mid-nineteenth century peak in the towns, Mutual Improvement Societies in the older tradition were more likely to be found in the smaller communities. But their format was usually that of the entertaining and undemanding lecture. For example, at Tregony in 1913, the Mutual Improvement Society began its new session with a paper read by the Rev. J. Harrison on 'Some Cornish legends', followed by some solos and a "humorous selection", no doubt greatly enjoyed by the 40 or so in attendance [West Briton, 30/10/13].

The Adult School movement provided weightier fare, although still within a predominantly lecture format. Membership of the Redruth Adult School was over 100 in 1913, but the content of the classes was heavily religious, adult schools having been established in the 19th century mainly by religious activists with the intention of teaching men and women to read. In Redruth, the adult school met on Sunday mornings and, in 1909, were listening to and discussing topics such as "John the Baptist before the people", or "Brotherhood in the workshop" [West Briton 9/9/09].

More secular evening classes were sometimes provided locally and were the forerunners of the later LEA provision. At St. Agnes School, evening classes were being held in 1913 in arithmetic, mensuration, English, mine surveying, mathematics, machine making and dressmaking - good, practical vocational subjects of obvious relevance to working people. Yet, this was another example of education being provided for the working classes rather than education controlled by the working classes. The provision of reading rooms, still being set up in Cornish villages in this period, was another example of this top-down provision. A new Reading Room, for example, was opened at Cubert in 1909. The organising committee comprised "various ladies, farmers and the Vicar" and about 40 men and youths enrolled as members, to use the papers, magazines, books and games provided. A nod in the direction of the growing demand from women for social equality was given by opening the room two afternoons a week for women and girls! Clearly, none of these quasieducational providers were involved in the kind of liberal education to a more rigorous level that was the dream of Albert Mansbridge and his fellow enthusiasts. It was, in fact, typical 19th century type voluntary provision - the better off providing some limited opportunities for their less privileged neighbours. Indeed, there was little, if any, demand for any other sort of adult education emerging from the grass roots in Cornwall. This was hardly surprising given the constraints noted above.

## War

Yet, within a few years of 1913, there did emerge some autonomous demands for education. It was the experience of four years of war that helps to explain this turnaround. The war years produced very different circumstances by 1918/19, circumstances that reversed, if only temporarily, many of those constraints hindering the development of working class education in Cornwall.The war closed off the migration option that had, for 70 years, tempted the more skilled to pursue their ambitions overseas. At the same time, war production led to an increasing demand for labour at the same time as thousands were pulled out of the labour force to be sent to the killing fields of eastern France. In this climate, the trade unions began to make sudden headway, especially after 1917. The Workers' Union in particular organised large numbers of semi and unskilled workers and expanded out of its base in the clay industry, most notably to establish the first permanent organisation among tin miners in 1917. Just as elsewhere, Cornish workers were not slow to take advantage of the fact that the industrial balance had swung in their favour.

From 1917, there were several cases of strike action in Cornwall, for example at J. and F. Pool's engineering factory at Hayle in September 1917, as newly organised workers took the chance to improve their pay and conditions. Demands for higher wages and action to achieve them became commonplace during the immediate post-war boom. In early 1919, tin miners at Geevor and South Crofty, dockers at Penzance and Falmouth, asylum workers at Bodmin, building workers at Truro, timber and coal merchants' workers at Camborne joined others in taking industrial action to secure better conditions. Cornwall had not seen unrest like this since the boom years of the early 1870s. Workers' Union officials were quick to point out that "it was impossible to control the men for any length of time" [West Briton 6/2/19]. Demands for higher wages soon spilt over into more generalised demands for reform and the case was acknowledged by some members of the local political establishment. On the opening of a canteen for workers at Falmouth Docks, the Mayoress of Falmouth, Mrs Spargo, spoke of workers being entitled to a just wage and added "there were places in Falmouth unfit for human habitation" [West Briton, 20/3/19].

Newly formed Trades Councils took the lead in this new discourse within which a previously largely invisible class began to assert its rights. Camborne Trades and Labour Council was demanding public conveniences in the town, Penryn TLC was suggesting names for magistrates and inquiring into the working conditions of laundrywomen, and at Penzance they were demanding an end to slum housing. Politically also, the Cornish working class was making itself heard. Two Labour candidates had appeared in the General Election of November 1918 and performed surprisingly well in the Camborne and St.Ives constituencies, winning 48% of the vote in a straight fight with a Liberal in Camborne. Labour and Trades Council candidates began winning local council seats at Falmouth and at St. Austell. In the latter place, the newly established Labour Party adopted wholesale those Urban District Council candidates recommended by the locally all-powerful Workers' Union in the spring of 1919.

But it was at Truro where the demands for change were perhaps made most loudly and insistently. At the opening of a new Co-operative Stores in Truro in January, 1919, the meeting echoed to the unmistakable tones of class war: “We, your brothers in industry, appeal for your co-operation in the Society which is owned and controlled by the workers, for the workers, to supply all their necessaries. Now is your opportunity to show your loyalty to trade union principles, and to support a store of your own, controlled on democratic lines...” [West Briton, 30/1/19] ” [West Briton, 30/1/19].

And it was here that educational demands were first raised. In early 1919, the Truro and District TLC urged Cornwall Council to provide nursery schools, to raise the school leaving age to 15 with a maintenance allowance for those over 14, to establish a school medical and dental programme and a system of school meals to tackle malnutrition, to give greater games facilities and ensure that there was no military training in the curriculum. There should, said the Trades Council, be “no loopholes in their scheme by which a child of the worker may be deprived of any part of his */sic/* birthright'' [West Briton 9/1/19].

It had thus been no accident that Truro was the first town in Cornwall with a WEA branch. In its early days the branch saw itself as very much a part of the industrial struggle of the times and the stirring political events that were convulsing central and eastern Europe as revolution shook the foundations of the old, pre-war order. At a meeting organised on the subject of 'Democracy and education' in March 1919 a speaker, the Rev. H. H. Clegg, argued that at the "bottom of the present unrest men were beginning to realise that they were men and were rising in revolt against any system that treated them as tools and machines'' [West Briton 27/3/19].

Later in the same year, the branch organised a lecture and discussion on 'Lenin, prophet or profligate?'. They met on a Sunday afternoon. "There was a large attendance, as everyone was on the tip toe of excitement as to what lines the lecture would take'' [Royal Cornwall Gazette, copy supplied by Mr Alf Jenkin of St. Austell]. Perhaps not surprisingly given the temper of the time, the lecturer, Mr C.Burnett Jr, argued that Lenin was "very popular with the people. He was a little commonplace type of man, with bald head and wrinkled face, but was beloved of the people and was without any personal ambition''. The chairman, in opening the discussion, said that the Bolshevik regime was "more full of hope than of terror''. In the spirited discussion that followed, speakers, including many local railwaymen such as Mr Behenna (either A.A. or J. Behenna, both later respected Truro

City Councillors) were not slow to draw analogies between the USSR and Britain. Those were, indeed, heady days.

But why was Truro the location for the first WEA branch rather than the more obviously proletarian Camborne-Redruth or St. Austell? Truro's history, in fact, made it rather exceptional. Perhaps surprisingly to the modern observer, Truro had a tradition of socialist and class politics more like some English towns and cities than the predominantly radical Liberal politics of Cornish towns. Back in 1848, the town had been one of the few centres of Cornish Chartism and it was, as we have seen, the local base for one of the first overtly socialist political parties - the SDF - in the 1890s. (The SDF won a seat on the City Council in 1904). The reasons for this have to be sought in its economy and its class structure. More than other Cornish towns, its working class had a strong leavening of skilled craftsmen in the 19th century, meeting the demands of a larger middle class market. It was those craft workers who had proved more fertile ground for Chartist and socialist ideas. Furthermore, in the larger towns, the ubiquitous presence of the chapel was more muted and, in consequence, radical Liberalism had less of a hold among the people than it had in the clay district, or the mining communities of the west, or the slate villages of the north. If we add to this the more obvious outlines of class inequalities in Truro, the 'County Town' for Cornwall's middle and landed elite, a group much less visible elsewhere, then we can begin to see why the town proved more amenable to the class politics that were emerging in the few decades around

1900. The presence of a well organised core of railway workers added the necessary catalyst to produce an assertive Labour political subculture in the Truro of 1918.

To sum up, the WEA - as an idea - was a product of what can be described as liberal self-help, seeing education, in John Stuart Mill's words, as ensuring the "highest and harmonious" development of individual characteristics. In this sense it was part of that broad stream of reforming liberalism, anchored to the individual self expression dear to the hearts of the Victorian middle classes, but prepared (unlike classical liberalism) to turn to the state for help in order that individuals could achieve their full potential. Many early labour movement pioneers, trade union organisers and socialist 'thinkers' in Edwardian Britain found themselves trapped within this kind of thinking. However, there were other voices. Those voices challenged the inherent top-down and cautious paternalism of the liberal model and claimed that real change was only to be achieved through class struggle, by the dispossessed demanding their inheritance and being prepared to take action to obtain it. In reality these two apparently contrasting approaches co-existed within the labour movement, indeed sometimes within the same individuals inside the labour movement. Sometimes those within the WEA have overstressed its liberal origins, placing it firmly within that progressive and apparently seamless 'rise' of liberal democracy that brought in its wake the practices, if not the substance, of democratic forms. (Whether they are truly democratic is still open to debate).

But in contrast, as we have seen from the way the

WEA emerged in Cornwall, the exciting, heady days of 1918/19 were the ones that propelled working men and women into getting involved in the WEA. These were precisely those years of heightened class struggle when working people, or a considerable number of them, were demanding far-reaching improvements in their conditions. The Truro WEA branch was rooted in this struggle, which is what gave its early meetings their obvious vitality. While its format was certainly in the spirit of the great Victorian liberals, it could be argued that the WEA saw its greatest qualitative steps forward taking place at times of political excitement and struggle, when real grass roots involvement emerged to add its dynamism to the more academic and abstract concerns of the founders. This is what, ultimately, made the WEA, if only for limited periods of time, different from the previous providers of adult education. It was democratic not because it was providing education theoretically for the majority, but because it was directly controlled by members of the majority class and not bureaucrats or professional educationalists.

As may be expected, such days of commitment and hope as in 1918/19 were to prove only too temporary. In the Cornish context, the ferment of that period was to be short lived. During 1920, the economic boom that had swung industrial power towards the worker began to abate and, in 1921, the Cornish economy plunged into the more familiar throes of gloomy depression as the general problems of the post-war British economy were worsened locally by a collapse in mineral prices, at one stage closing every single Cornish mine and throwing West

Cornwall into the deepest gloom. The WEA, with no funds to build a permanent organisation in the good years, had, from 1921, to work in Cornwall in an environment of chronically high unemployment, low wages and a resumed flow of emigration, although this time more likely to be across the Tamar than overseas. The 1917-1920 period had been exceptional. It had led to the appearance of genuine grass roots demands for adult education, especially in the Truro area, but the longer term growth of the WEA in Cornwall would depend on other factors, as we shall see in the next chapter.

*Anne Treneer, Cornish author of 'Schoolhouse in the Wind' and WEA tutor*

# CHAPTER TWO: THE INTER WAR YEARS: MAKING IT WORK 1920-38

BERNARD DEACON

In these years, the annual reports of the new district were laced with homely and encouraging analogies about the WEA's growth from infancy to the verge of adulthood. A glance at the statistics (see appendix) bears out a story of impressive growth. The seven classes of 1919/20, meeting in five centres, had grown to 59 classes in 29 centres by 1938/39. There were 1,272 students in 1938/39, compared with the 203 of 1919/20. However, on closer inspection, we can see that expansion was neither steady nor trouble-free.

In the 1920s there was no clear growth trend. The number of classes in Cornwall bumped along at between 10 and 14. Then, in 1928/29, began four years of spectacular growth, during which classes grew by a factor of five and students by four. Apparently exhausted by this effort, the years from 1933 to 1939 were ones of stabilisation. In fact, the number of classes drifted downwards - from 67 to 44 at the end of the decade. We can therefore identify three periods - one of no growth from 1920 to 1929, four years of expansion from 1929 to 1933 and a period of stabilisation or perhaps slight retraction from 1933 to 1939.

The explanation for this is quite mundane. It's not the varying popular demand for education, or the changing ideologies of adult education, or at least only very indirectly. No, the key factor was money, the amount of money people could afford to spend on attending classes and, more important, the amount the WEA had to spend on providing classes. The first District Annual Report summed things up. "This is a very poor district in comparison with others. The various organisations [i.e. trade unions and co-operative societies] are not so numerous, or so large, or so well-off, as in the North, and it makes it difficult for much financial support to be obtained from them. Most of the societies are in their infancy, fighting for their own existence ..." If this was true of the District in general it was doubly the case in Cornwall. A special note was appended to the class statistics of 1921/22, "Industrial depression has affected Cornwall classes severely". This followed a similar note in 1920/21, "Industrial depression has affected West Cornwall classes adversely."

## Economic problems

1921 heralded two decades of chronic unemployment in Cornwall, particularly in the West. A catastrophic tin price collapse in 1920 and 1921, blamed by many on the government release of tin stocks built up in wartime, led to the Cornish mines, hard hit by the difficult years of war, closing down or resorting to care and maintenance. Five thousand miners, concentrated on the Camborne-Redruth area, were thrown on to national assistance or charity. At first, apparent disaster seemed confined to mining but, as 1921 wore on, the rest of the Cornish economy also felt the stiff breeze of recession. The West

Briton lamented that 1921 was "a tale of woe". "On all sides there are unemployment, poverty, distress and in many cases starvation ... undoubtedly (this was) the blackest period in the history of the extreme western part of the country ... Truly it is a gloomy picture, with scarcely a ray of hope" [WB, 29/12/1921]. The Cornish had good reason to believe that the gods had deserted them entirely. In addition to the economic difficulties, in May of 1921 East Pool, perhaps the most promising Cornish mine, had suffered the "greatest catastrophe of its history". A major shaft collapse below 130 fathoms put all its electric pumps out of action and threatened to flood not just East Pool but neighbouring South Crofty as well.

Meanwhile, the Duke of Cornwall made a two day tour of West Cornwall in the Spring but, while expressing concern for the welfare of the people, he had to "regret I cannot give more help". Help was even less forthcoming from the Government who, unsympathetic to the plight of a relatively small community well away from London, steadfastly refused to give financial aid to help pumping costs. To make matters worse the general economic recession soon led to cuts in government expenditure in 1921 and the axe fell on housing schemes and social spending.

In the midst of this disaster people had little spare cash for WEA classes. In a situation when the mayor of Penzance could claim, in December 1921, that "there were at Penzance children practically starving and men and women suffering in secret hunger and privation without murmuring" people did not have much left over for luxuries. For example, the landlord of the Miners' Arms, Bissoe, when prosecuted for selling drink out of hours, could claim in his defence in late 1921 that he had only sold six pints of beer all week. No spare money for the drinking classes probably meant no money for evening classes either. Soup kitchens, unemployment relief committees, Poor Law Guardians' meetings "virtually besieged by hundreds of demonstrating workless miners", miners' choirs travelling the length and breadth of Britain singing for charity - these were the humiliating order of the day.

Of course, such dark days could not last for ever. Things improved somewhat in the later 1920s. Even the mines labour force recovered to 3,300 in the best year of 1928, whereas the clay industry was doing quite well. However farming - another mainstay of the Cornish economy - was not enjoying prosperity as Cornish farmers struggled to pay off debts incurred on buying out their farms at high prices in 1919-1921 when the large estates fragmented. Attempts to set up cooperatives, particularly in dairying, in the 1920s were "disappointing". Moreover, any long term recovery was brought to an abrupt halt in 1920 as the international depression began to bite in Cornwall.

The result was by now familiar. There was a steady drift of younger people away in search of work and very high unemployment rates. Male unemployment in the winter of 1935, not the worst winter by any means, averaged 22%. There were pockets of much greater unemployment. In Gunnislake 65% of men were without work. In the St. Columb travel to work area, which included the northern clay villages - badly hit by the falling world demand in clay, male unemployment was 44%, in Redruth 40%, in St. Agnes 38%, in Torpoint 37%. Only the far north and east and Newquay, where tourism seems - unlike nowadays - to have reduced unemployment, to some degree escaped the economic problems of the 1930s.

## The WEA in the 1920s

In times like these, it was clear that the WEA could not look to local trade unions or co-operative societies for financial backing. In fact, what outside support there was in Cornwall came from the various teachers' associations, beginning with the Assistant Masters' Secondary Schools Association in the mid-1920s. The Penzance Co-operative Society was the only other regular contributor to District funds from the late 1920s. Camborne Co-operative Society affiliated from 1927 to 1930 but the economic recession was followed by the ending of financial help from this quarter. The sole trade union support came from various branches of the Union of Post Office Workers in 1931 and 1932 - at Par, Liskeard and Penzance. At a time when the WEA leadership was swinging from the Universities to the Trade Unions, there was little involvement of trade union branches in Cornwall. The Workers Education Trade Union Committee (WETUC), formed in 1919, didn't really make much headway in Cornwall until a special conference in Camborne in 1927/28, which attracted the considerable number of 70 trade union representatives, and Saturday Schools at Falmouth and Truro the year after. But little came of this initiative and, in 1931/32 there were again special WETUC funded efforts at Camborne to "interest more trade unionists in educational work" [Annual Report, 1931/32].

The dispersed Cornish population and consequent travelling difficulties were not helpful. J.W.Muir, the WEA propagandist who was sent on a tour of Britain in 1924/25, partly as a response to the competition from the marxist led Labour College, summed up the local problems after a visit to Camborne. "The difficulties ... are very great - the distances between likely places being tremendous, travelling costly, and poverty very real." And, occasionally, other more temporary problems might intrude, as in 1923/24 when "a short course was also attempted at St. Austell; but owing partly to the election it had to be dropped after the fourth meeting." As a result of these factors, and in contrast to a steady expansion in Devon, the District Reports of the 1920s constantly refer to "Developments" in Cornwall being "held up by lack of financial support" [Annual Report, 1927/28].

## The Joint Committee

The weak and demoralised trade union movement in Cornwall and a relatively underdeveloped Co-op organisation with comparatively modern roots made any growth based on the organised labour movement difficult, to say the least. Financial shortcomings would not be overcome from this source. Partly as a consequence Cornwall had led the way in another direction by evolving a unique organisational umbrella - the Cornwall Adult Education Joint Committee. This was set up in the spring of 1920 following a meeting of the Higher Education Committee of Cornwall Council and a WEA delegation. The local education authority agreed to help maintain one year classes and gave a £60 grant towards this. It was a well meaning gesture and sowed the seeds for long term co-operation between the providers of adult education in Cornwall. Close co-operation remained the order of the day at least until the late 1960s. The WEA and LEA in Cornwall, unlike some other places, remained on relatively cordial terms and this cosy arrangement was strengthened in the 1930s with the addition of a University College of Exeter Resident Tutor. This close liaison between WEA and LEA in Cornwall can most easily be explained as a result of the absence of alternative and autonomous labour movement support, itself a consequence of the various social and economic factors outlined in the first chapter and above.

However, whereas the formation of the Joint Committee was of long term importance, it meant little in actual cash support. The annual grant from Cornwall Council grew only slowly from £60 in 1920/21 to £125 in 1931. Alone, it could not solve the chronic resource problem, which remained a major constraint as long as the District had to rely solely on the limited grant aid from the Board of Education in London.

Nevertheless, the LEA was crucial in helping to initiate the up-turn in fortunes in the 1929/30 session. In 1928/29, before the financial crisis bit, it made a special grant to the WEA for some short terminal classes (six weeks). This money, plus a special grant from the UK Carnegie Trust, allowed the District to appoint its first part time tutor-organiser in 1929/30. The part time tutor was a young Cornish graduate, the son of a railwayman, who had come back from Oxford in 1928 - F.L.Harris. Fred was instrumental in boosting the number of classes from 13 in 1928/29 to 23 in 1929/30. In doing this he was helped by T.S.Attlee, a tutor of a very different background. Tom Attlee was the brother of Clement Attlee, the later Prime Minister, an architect, a committeed Christian and a conscientious objector during the 1914-18 War, who had come to Cornwall for convalescent purposes. At the same time Saturday Schools were held at Redruth, on unemployment and on Italian Art, and at St. Austell, one on public opinion and society and the other led by another young Cornish Oxford graduate, a certain A.L.Rowse, who gave a talk to 70 people on the subject of 'the value of history and literature'. The WEA in Cornwall was beginning to take off.

The success of this take-off owed a good deal to a deliberate attempt by the WEA headquarters from 1927 to promote educational work in rural areas, aided by Carnegie Trust funds. Carnegie money had already been won by the South West District for extension work in North Devon. In 1930, following on the success of the 1929/30 session the Carnegie Trust responded to another request for help by a three year grant for extension work in Cornwall, to begin on January 1st, 1931. This was the breakthrough. With this grant the District was able to appoint two full time tutor-organisers; one for the west, and the other for mid-Cornwall. F.L.Harris was appointed for West Cornwall and T.G.Jones, a Welshman and former steel worker with a long term connection, both as student and tutor, with the WEA in South Wales, took up the post in the St. Austell area.

## Take-off, 1929/1933

The effect of the full time tutors and the extra resources was immediate. Classes sprang up as new centres were opened up and old ones revived. The 20 centres of 1930/31 grew to 35 in 1932/33. For the first time, the WEA was reaching areas outside the industrial and market towns. Places such as St. Columb Minor, Tregony, St. Erme and Flushing reverberated to the clamour of villagers discussing classes in economics, history and the British Empire. Clay communities such as Nanpean and Roche were being reached. Coastal Parishes - Gorran, Mevagissey, Looe - echoed to discussions of 'modern problems' and '19th century problems'. All this activity had the result of narrowing the gap between Cornwall and its neighbour Devon. In 1928/29, 64 courses of all kinds had been put on in Devon, compared with only 19 in Cornwall. Even allowing for Cornwall's smaller population (about 40% that of Devon) the WEA was clearly less effective in Cornwall. But, by 1933/34 this position had reversed itself. In that year, there were 84 courses in Devon and 66 in Cornwall. Cornwall had almost bridged the gap. More than that, the WEA was now - allowing for the population disparity - more active in Cornwall.

The appointment of full time tutors, coinciding as it did with rapidly mounting unemployment, enabled the WEA in Cornwall to do what would now be termed 'out-reach' work among the unemployed. Then, as now, it was WEA policy to welcome the unemployed free of charge or at very low rates. F.L.Harris in Camborne "made a strong effort to commence educational work among the unemployed and met with considerable success" [Report 1931/32]. This was soon followed up elsewhere. In 1932/33 T.G.Jones, who was also secretary of the local Unemployed Social Services Association, helped to show the Duke of Cornwall what was being done for and by the unemployed in his area. This work culminated in a two week summer camp at Gwithian, attended by 30 unemployed students from Camborne, Redruth and St. Austell. Two weeks were spent "hearing lectures, taking part in discussions, reading books etc." [Report 1933/34].

These initiatives were no doubt greatly valued by the participants. However, the intention was to encourage unemployed students to get involved in the general class provision and for this there is less evidence of success. The unemployed were always very under-represented in the classes. (For example, when male unemployment was 22% in Cornwall, only 4.6% of the male students were unemployed. The unemployed woman was even less likely to attend classes.) Mary Stocks, in her history of the first 50 years of the WEA, summed this up, when she wrote of the growing realisation that "even unlimited leisure, when shadowed by anxiety and resentment, is not conducive to intellectual concentration or objective thought" (Stocks, 109) although one could question her implied definition of 'objective'.

Extending adult education to the smaller communities and to the unemployed was complemented by an extension of adult education to the male industrial worker, at least according to the annual reports. The new classes, in the St. Austell area especially, attracted people "of the wage-earning type and the number of men students is above the average". According to the District, the explanation was that "most of the classes are in the clay mining villages and that the subjects have been chiefly concerned with economics and economic history" [Report, 1931/32]. The predominance of manual male labour in this area and linked attitudes about the proper role of women may also have been important factors in this. In any case, the greater number of manual industrial workers coming to classes in the clay district was in fact balanced by the greater number of professional, clerical and retail workers, farmers and a few agricultural labourers attending the greater class provision in other areas. The net result was that the proportion of manual workers in 1931-33 was no higher - in fact it was slightly lower - than in 1926-28. However, there had been a marked swing towards male students. More of the extra students attracted in these years were male than female, which shifted the gender balance from 52-48 in favour of men in 1926-28 to 58-42 in the early 1930s.

More centres, more classes, more students. By 1933/34 the District was drawing the logical conclusion, that "courses follow the provision of funds for organising and that almost everywhere additional classes could be commenced if further grants for organising were made". In places like Cornwall, without a strong indigenous labour organisation, this was even more the case. Development depended on top-down initiatives, on organisers, administrators and grant money. Grass roots enthusiasm for adult education, although this doubtless existed, was not enough of itself to maintain the work of the WEA.

## From 1935 - holding the line

Given this, the imminent end of the Carnegie grant was giving growing cause for concern by 1935. A two year extension had been made from January 1934, but this would run out at the end of 1935. Despite the fact that "from all quarters, lay and expert, tributes to the valuable work of the two full time tutors have been received ..." [Report 1935/36], there was just no money to keep them. The Carnegie grant had been renewed with the expectation that "the Cornwall LEA would thereby be enabled to assume financial responsibility". But, despite an increased LEA grant, this was never, in the economic climate of the 1930s, a reasonable expectation. It looked as if the WEA in Cornwall might revert to the state it had been in the 1920s.

However, the worst consequences were avoided by two things. First, under new regulations in the early 1930s, the Universities had been allowed to establish extra-mural resident tutors. University College, Exeter had formed an Extra-Mural Delegacy in 1932/33 and, following the appointment of a full time tutor based at Exeter in 1934, it appointed a Resident Tutor in Cornwall in 1935. F.L.Harris became its first tutor and was thus able to carry on his adult education work uninterrupted, Fred's close involvement with the WEA, plus the existence of the Cornwall Joint Committee meant that the fighting over

over territory that happened in some other areas, as the expanding University Extra Mural Departments clashed with strong WEA branches and districts, was avoided in Cornwall. Things were much more friendly here, where J.G.Trevena, the District Secretary, insisted in regarding F.L. as being virtually an employee of the WEA. For all intents and purposes University courses in Cornwall were indistinguishable from WEA classes. Meanwhile, money had been found from central funds to employ T.G.Jones for one more year on a temporary basis. To the relief of the District Office, and no doubt Jones himself, he succeeded in gaining another WEA post in Cumberland and left Cornwall in the summer of 1936.

The second factor that helped the WEA to survive the 1930s without too much contraction was the somewhat greater local voluntary organisation - the legacy of the expansion of the 1929-33 period. For example, Camborne-Redruth branch in 1936-37 supervised WEA work in the locality and was responsible for two Short Terminal courses (six weeks), five Terminals (10 weeks), one Tutorial class, one wireless group, five study circles and one Day School. This helped to some extent to ease the administrative gap opened up by the decline in funds and full time personnel that the WEA had suffered generally in the early 1930s.

Again, it's worth noting how the experience of the WEA in Cornwall differed from other places. According to Mary Stocks, class numbers in the inter-war period flourished because of the increased partnership with trade unions and co-operative societies [Stocks, 102-106]. In Cornwall these were much less crucial. Instead, the WEA co-operated closely with Cornwall Council and, in the later 1930s, with the University College at Exeter. At the same time, general developments - concern for the unemployed, efforts to increase rural classes - were reflected in Cornwall but took place in a somewhat different context. In 1931 G.D.H. Cole was worrying that "the WEA might become a sort of universal provider of adult education at the expense of concentrating on working class education" [Stocks 106]. But in Cornwall it was already well on its way to becoming a universal provider. It's difficult to pinpoint a time when it has 'concentrated' on working class education. There was never a 'golden age' of working class education for the WEA in Cornwall. In fact, the percentage of manual workers, male and female, attending WEA classes in Cornwall fell from 19.5% of the total in 1931-33 to 13.7% in 1936-38. By the later period the proportion of manual workers had fallen below that in Devon, where it was 15.0% in 1936-38 (compared with 13.4% in 1931-33). The absence of a specifically WEA tutor and the freedom given to F.L.Harris by the University meant that Fred was already, in the 1930s, starting to experiment with liaising with other organisations outside the traditional labour movement, for example Men's and Women's Institutes or Young Methodist Groups, in the quest to root adult education in the communities of Cornwall.

## The Classes

When focussing on the history of an organisation it's all too easy to lose sight of its aims, and the WEA's aims were to provide for the education of men and women.

But what was it providing? What subjects were people studying? In the early days, the WEA locally followed the pioneers in providing classes in economic history and economics. These were what it was felt the horny handed sons (and daughters?) of toil demanded. And they were subjects where the early tutors had most expertise. Four out of the seven classes in the first year of the Cornwall WEA were devoted to 'industrial history', although the class with the largest enrollment - a staggering 78 students - studied Shakespeare.

By the mid-1920s, the emphasis had swung away from industrial history. The favoured subjects were, by then, general modern history, closely followed by English literature. These accounted for over half the classes. Human geography, politics and 'Greece and modern culture' made up the numbers. A third of the classes were studying various kinds of history - from Imperialism to social movements - in 1930/31. By this time the proportion of broadly social science classes - economics, politics and economic history - had risen to over a quarter of the total and literature had declined. Moreover, new ground had been broken. Classes on music, geology and science show that the WEA was trying to widen its appeal, or perhaps responding to changing demand.

Musical appreciation had, however, disappeared from the courses on offer by the mid-1930s. By then, new subjects had appeared. The most prominent of these were general courses on 'Modern problems', 'World problems' or 'European problems', as tutors and students strived to make sense of the economic and political environment of the 30s. Two other new subjects had made their appearance - psychology, growing in popularity as Freud's work became more widely known - and biology. Both these subjects were taught by among others, Frank Turk, who has pointed out that biology was an unusual subject to be offered to adults. Only Hull University was, at the time, teaching biology to adults.

A growing concern about events in Europe, as war clouds approached, is evident from the course profile for 1938/39. Various aspects of English and European history had regained their prominence (amounting to almost a third of the grant earning classes in that year) and these were joined by new courses in international politics. For example, quite specific courses were offered on British and German foreign policy. Clearly, the WEA in Cornwall to some extent reflected the contemporary concerns of the 1930s, although there remained a good core of literature classes.

One notable feature of the 1920s was the size of classes. This was partly because of the restricted government grant aid which made large classes necessary in order to keep revenues up. And it was partly because of the absence of alternatives. The largest class enrolled in the inter-war period was at Liskeard, where 107 students crowded in to hear Mr Travers, a local school teacher, expound on human geography in 1921/22. The largest enrollments are listed below. Most, it will be noted, were in the early days. As the WEA expanded into the rural areas the average class size fell.

| number | course | tutor | place | year |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 107 | Human geography | R.A.Travers | Liskeard | 1921/22 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 99 | Shakespeare & Dickens | Rev. Ewen | Truro | 1920/21 |
| 82 | Economics | R.A.Travers | Liskeard | 1922/23 |
| 78 | Shakespeare | Rev.Ewen | Truro | 1919/20 |
| 67 | Economics | R.A.Travers | Fowey | 1923/24 |
| 59 | Human Geography | R.A.Travers | Fowey | 1922/23 |
| 59 | English Literature | A.K.H.Jenkin | St.Ives | 1924/25 |
| 57 | Literature | MissI.Watson | Liskeard | 1923/24 |
| 56 | German foreign policy | Dr.Chaput | Falmouth | 1938/3 |
| 51 | Industrial history | F.L.Harris | Nanpean | 1929/30 |
| 50 | The onward march of man | R.R.Butler | Liskeard | 1929/30 |

Classes of this size must have been like public meetings. Nevertheless, the WEA 'method', which had emerged before 1914, could still be employed. This involved a set lecture and then questions and discussion. According to Frank Turk, by the 1930s J.G.Trevena "more or less insisted on" this format. Such a style could operate with a very large class but, clearly, meaningful class discussion and written work would have been somewhat less easy.

The pioneers had recognised this in 1908 when they initiated the tutorial class - the jewel in the adult education crown and the supposed bridge from general numbers were limited. "If 30 students would pledge to make regular attendances and submit regular written work for a class covering two years ..." [Stocks, 37]. (Interestingly, this format has been revived in the modern University certificate courses.) Later the two years was extended to three, thus faithfully mirroring the three year full time university degree course. By 1924 the system was rationalised. Changes in the grant system meant that the WEA was able to run terminals and one year classes, while tutorial classes were only to be undertaken by University committees. This recognised the implicit hierarchy of the courses that had emerged. However, the WEA was still involved closely in tutorial classes, and the sign of a flourishing branch was one that maintained a tutorial class.

Tutorial classes certainly acted as a bridge for adult students to enter the rarified world of the pre-war Universities. In this sense they creamed off a small academic elite, who often themselves followed a predictable career path into higher or adult education. One of the first Cornish students to take advantage of this route was Stanley Opie of Redruth, secretary of the local branch and member of the Camborne tutorial class in 1932/33, who won a three year scholarship to Oxford, where he read anthropology. Many others were to follow in Stanley Opie's footsteps before higher education began to open up in the 1960s.

Although the ideal of tutorial classes - dedicated students turning in an essay every two weeks, reading widely and discussing in depth - was no doubt sometimes realised, it was always going to be difficult in a rural population. The first problem lay in attracting sufficient students to put on tutorial classes. In fact tutorial classes in Cornwall - at their peak in 1934/35 there were five, at St. Blazey, St. Austell, Nanpean, Camborne and Falmouth - rarely reached the ideal standard. Obtaining the necessary written work was always a struggle. This is perhaps hardly surprising when one considers that the theoretical essay requirement was at least twice that of a modern Open University student following a one credit course. In other classes, written work was the exception rather than the norm. In 1936/37 just five of the 56 classes in Cornwall were doing written work, although the annual report for 1937/38 proudly related a surprising leap to 15 out of 59. The standard of this written work was not discussed.

## Tutors

Encouraging written work from mature part time students depended on the individual tutor. And finding tutors was itself a major headache for the early WEA in Cornwall. In the second year of the District the annual report bemoaned the fact that "the work will certainly be held up in Cornwall unless more suitable tutors can be found". Again, in 1927/28, the report noted that the chief problem in Cornwall was a "lack of suitable lecturers". The supply was "very limited" in a region that did not have its own centre of higher education outside the specialised School of Mines. On the other hand Cornwall was fortunate in having some committed school teachers to draw on. R.A.Travers at Liskeard has already been mentioned. There was also, in the 1930s, R.R.Blewett at St. Day, a greatly respected teacher who knew his local community inside out. Unattached graduates like the young Fred Harris, or T.S.Attlee or A.K.Hamilton Jenkin were also invaluable local resources. Another unattached graduate who was destined to become one of the best loved and skilled adult education tutors in Cornwall was Frank Turk. His induction into the W.E.A. is a good example of how tutors were obtained. Stanley Opie, mentioned above, asked Frank to give a talk at Murdoch House in 1934. As a consequence, Arthur Pearse Jenkin of Trewirgie House, who was the District Treasurer from 1922 to 1936, then asked him to consider doing some classes. Frank Turk agreed and was "launched on a career that grew around me" [Information from Frank Turk].

## The students

Courses could be offered, tutors could be found, but ultimately the WEA depended on groups of willing students. Who attended classes in the inter-war period? In the 1930s - as in more recent times - there was much agonising in the higher reaches of the WEA about whether the organisation was doing enough to reach the working class. It's clear from the bare statistics that, in Cornwall at least, manual workers were always under-represented in classes, as was the farming community. Tradesmen, professionals, teachers and students were, on the other hand, over-represented. The following table shows the broad occupational breakdown of WEA students over three periods.

| | **1926-28** | **1931-33** | **1936-38** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Manual workers | 20.8% | 19.5% | 13.9% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prof/clerical/ retail/retired | 27.9% | 27.1% | 24.7% |
| Domestic duties/ housewives | 27.1% | 24.4% | 34.0% |
| Teachers/students | 18.5% | 17.3% | 17.7% |
| Farming/fishing | 1.0% | 4.1% | |
| Unemployed | - | 6.6% | 9.5% |
| Not known/misc. | 4.7% | 1.1% | |
| Men | 51.6% | 58.2% | 47.5% |
| Women | 48.4% | 41.9% | 52.4% |

In the earlier period there was a rough gender balance. The emphasis on extension work for the unemployed shifted this balance away from women in the early 1930s, but by the mid-1930s the balance was restored and in fact more women were attending WEA classes by the end of the decade, as the proportion of housewives rose dramatically.

To our eyes students seemed to hear about the classes almost by magic. Advertising on the modern scale was unheard of. On the other hand there was little competition from other bodies. As much faith seems to have put in word of mouth contacts via existing class members and, in the later 1930s, by contacts and talks to local organisations. The word spread - "you really ought to come along". Despite the larger numbers there was probably a more supportive feel to attending the first class than there is now in our more anonymous mass consumption society.

The presence of people from the various social groups in one WEA class led, in the view of Frank Turk, to a good cross spectrum. Frank remembers the classes, meeting in private houses or in draughty church halls, or the Toc H hall at Troon, where the fire smoked so much that the door had to be left open, as being "as near classless as you could get". Individual students stand out in the memory. There was Dick Jefferies, a truck driver at Holmans, Camborne and a committed member of the small Cornish branch of the Communist Party, who read voraciously and tried to invent a form of perpetual motion. Or the farm labourer of a strong religious persuasion, who attended the Breage classes in the 1930s. This student couldn't afford to buy books, so he walked from Breage to Helston every Saturday evening and stood reading books from a local book stall. In this way he apparently succeeded in teaching himself New Testament Greek! Along with such self taught men in the tradition of the 19th century, Cornwall's role as a retirement haven meant that people who had distinguished careers behind them could turn up in some classes. At Fowey, Mrs Singer, whose husband was a leading authority on the history of science, was herself an expert on medieval Spanish and had written on alchemical manuscripts in European libraries. The presence of such students meant that tutors had to be very careful with any casual generalisations.

While Tory J.P.s could presumably happily rub shoulders in the same class with members of the Communist Party, there were sometimes divisions along

Again Frank Turk remembers a psychology class at Hayle where the Catholics sat on one side and the Protestants on the other, or a class at Mevagissey with the locals on one side and the "visitors" on the other. But the net result of WEA classes must have been to widen social horizons and bring people in touch with attitudes and opinions that they might not otherwise have met even though a "cross-spectrum" often meant in fact a predominantly middle class student body.

## Geographical constraints

The geographical isolation of most classes in Cornwall meant, perhaps inevitably, that loyalties were to the particular class or a tutor rather than to the WEA as a whole. Of course there were some, such as Tommy Oxland, a postman at Illogan, who devoted himself to WEA work. A strong local branch certainly counted for something and helped "make for a different kind of class" [FT] with a greater possibility of active reading and discussion. Nevertheless, distance meant that travel costs were high and this influenced the nature of the pre-war voluntary movement. This in turn was reflected in the early form of district organisation. Three federations were established, incidentally ignoring the historic boundary of Cornwall in an arbitary and insensitive manner. These were for west Cornwall, Tamar and mid-Devon, delegates to District Council being nominated by these federations. In 1925/26, with the emergence of more branches, this system was scrapped and branches were directly represented on District Council. As a result the two eastern federations dissolved, although the West Cornwall Federation remained in being for a time as "it has distinct functions connected with the work of the Cornwall Adult Education Joint Committee'' [Report 1925/26].

If distance meant difficulties for voluntary organisation, it also meant that tutors often had quite a logistical problem in reaching classes in the days before car ownership was widespread. Later, Frank Turk travelled by motorcycle, but in his early WEA days in Cornwall, he used to have to catch three buses in order to reach his evening class at Breage, only 15 miles or so from his home near Camborne. He could reach Breage by changing at Helston and then Porthleven. It was trickier coming back. The last bus via Helston left before the end of his finishing time so he had to catch the Penzance bus, get off at Long Rock and then pick up the last Penzance-Camborne bus. This arrived in Camborne around midnight and it was sometimes after one in the morning by the time he had finished his walk home. F.L.Harris also relates how , when teaching at Nanpean, one of the class would be posted at the door towards the end of the session, to spot the last country bus to St. Austell. If this one was missed it meant the last train to Redruth would also be missed. However, it must be pointed out that journeys by public transport are often even more tortuous nowadays, with the demise of many branch railway lines and country bus services. Without a car a modern tutor would be very hard put to get to an evening class off the main railway line.

## The branches

With the problems of distance and the lack of full time

## The branches

With the problems of distance and the lack of full time WEA organisers in the 1920s and after 1935, although F.L.Harris to some extent combined this with his new post as Resident Tutor, the number of fully fledged branches was never large. As we saw in the first chapter Truro was the first branch in Cornwall. It was soon followed - in 1920 - by Fowey. These were two very different branches. The Truro branch arose out of the surge of local labour organisation at the end of the War. In 1919/20 it had 60 members, which was 15 more than at Plymouth. However, the branch faded with the setbacks to organised labour in Cornwall after 1921, and more widely after 1924. In 1925/26, the Truro branch was "adversely affected by lack of co-ordination" [Report, 1925/26]. This seems to be a code for disagreements within the branch. For whatever reason, Truro put on no classes from that year to 1928/29 and the branch collapsed.

In contrast, Fowey was hardly the centre of a militant working class consciousness. Its branch, ably organised for over half a century by E.W.Godden, a local Grammar School teacher who became vice-chairman of the District in 1929, ploughed its own furrow. It was in the older tradition of the Literary Institution or the village mutual improvement society, steadily putting on its annual course of classes. This meant that the Fowey branch was not dependent on changing fashions or the ups and downs of other social forces. Indeed, by the 1930s it was the largest branch in Cornwall and was only overtaken in 1938/39 - by Camborne-Redruth branch, which of course

1923/24 the branch total had reached seven, at Fowey, Truro, Camborne, Launceston, Liskeard, Falmouth and Redruth. The organised WEA was clearly geographically confined to the mid-west and to certain towns in the east. There were no branches at Penzance or St. Ives, or at St. Austell, Newquay or Bodmin. The clay district was difficult to organise. Or at least it was until the appointment of T.G.Jones as full time tutor organiser there in 1931. This seems somewhat strange in view of the higher level of trade unionism in that area in the 1920s and the penetration of the Labour Party there during the same period. (A.L.Rowse came close to being elected as Labour M.P. for the Truro-St. Austell constituency in 1935!). It may be related to the absence of a strong tradition of self-help voluntary education in the area. St. Austell Literary Institution never really thrived in the 19th century in contrast to its fellows in other places. Or it could be a result of the smaller number of skilled as opposed to semi-skilled workers. Although, once organised, the St. Austell area produced some very good classes in the 1930s. So perhaps we should look to the role of the local middle class. In the 1890s, St. Austell Urban District Council was the only local authority in Cornwall to reject Passmore Edwards' offer of a free library, as it would add a half penny to the rates! Perhaps the latter points to a particularly philistine local middle class.

Unfortunately, the annual reports fail to list the branches between 1924/25 and 1930/31. But the seven active branches of 1923/24 had fallen to just three by 1931/32 - at Fowey, Launceston and Hayle. The Hayle branch expired in 1932/33, not to re-appear again in the 1930s, and the Launceston branch, partly kept in being by continuous tutorial classes organised directly from Exeter, only lasted another year. However, there was a slow growth in the number of functioning branches from 1933/34. The number never reached the peak of the early 1920s, but by the late 1930s there were five branches in Cornwall. Together with Fowey, these were Redruth and St. Austell (organised by the two full time tutors), Truro (which re-appeared in 1934) and Penzance, which joined the list in 1936. The sickly Truro branch faltered again at the end of the 1937/38 session, but was replaced by a revived branch at Liskeard in 1938/39. With the exception of Fowey and Liskeard, it seems that only the larger population centres could support a branch, and even here there were exceptions, such as Falmouth/ Penryn or Newquay. The number of branches suggest that, while total class and student numbers had risen considerably in the early 1930s the voluntary movement in Cornwall did not have a massive vigour of its own as the 1930s drew to their close.

## Campaigning for education

The pre-war WEA had a much more prominent and campaigning role than nowadays. Rallies and Day Schools were held both to promote the cause of education in general in the days before free secondary education for all, and to defend education, particularly adult education, against treasury inspired cutbacks. This educational campaigning began on a large scale outside Cornwall in 1916, when the WEA led the calls for a raising of the school leaving age and free education for all. Fisher's

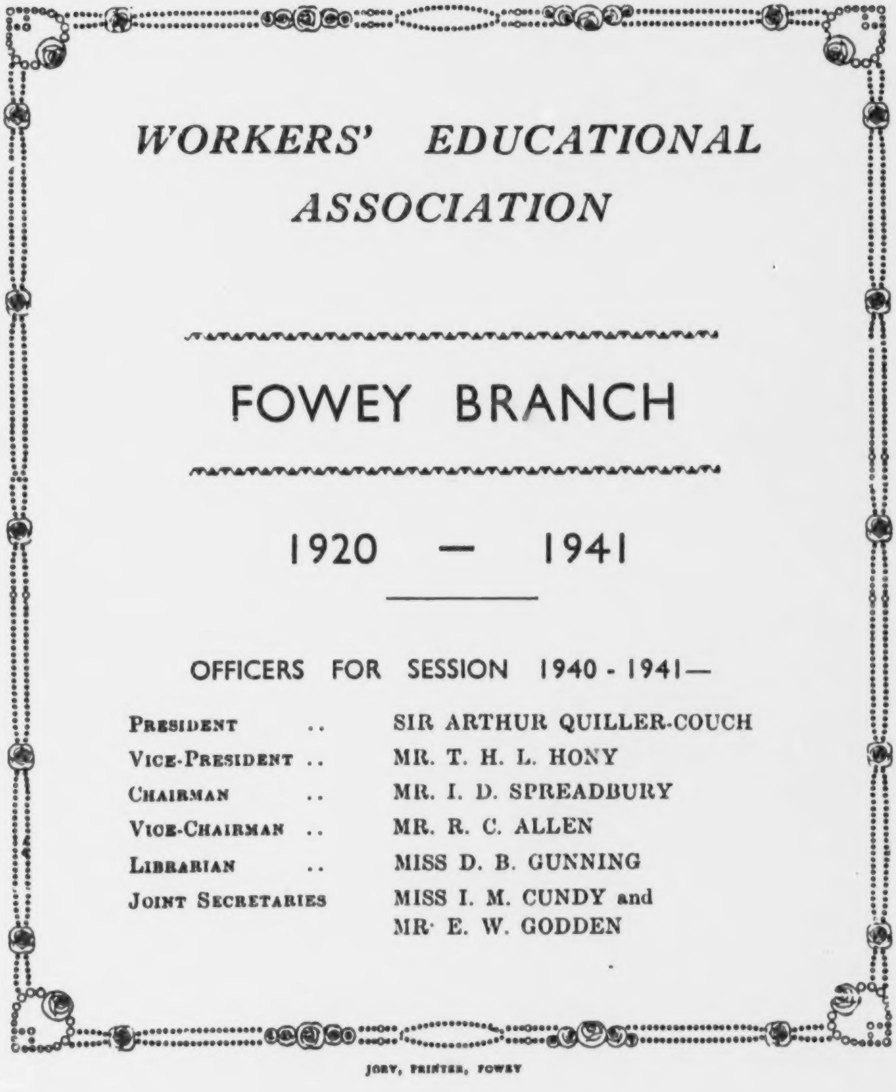
Education Act of 1918 moved some small way towards this, although a lot of its provisions were to succumb to the financial cuts of 1921. Cornwall was unable to play much of a role in the campaigns against the cuts although the WEA had organised conferences in conjunction with the Cornwall Education Committee in 1919 at Truro and Falmouth, to popularise the provisions of the 1918 Act.

The organisation locally took a more prominent campaigning role in the 1930s. In 1931/32 - in the face of cutbacks caused by the financial crisis of 1931 - it organised two rallies on education at Truro and Penzance. There was distinguished platform at Truro, comprising Dr. John Murray, the Principal of University College, Exeter; C.V.Thomas, F.R.Pascoe and E.Browning Lyne (prominent members of the Cornwall Education Committee); Miss Pedder, the Principal of the Diocesan Training College, Truro and H.E.Boothroyd, HMI for adult aducation along with delegates from the WEA and WETUC. The following year, education defence conferences were again organised at St. Austell and Truro, while in 1935/36 there occurred an Education rally at Lanhydrock, where Isaac Foot, the charismatic hope of pre-war Cornish Liberalism, was one of the two speakers.

The organisation did not, while campaigning for general educational reform and defence, forget its own priorities. In 1936/37 a Conference of tutors at Truro discussed whether they should "aim at arousing general interest in a large part of the subject or at giving detailed information upon a small section of it". "Good arguments were put forward on both sides". It's a question still largely unresolved.

With war very near the WEA was still organising and educating for the longer term. In 1938/39 forty people attended a Conference at St. Austell on Spen's Report on Secondary Education. This report pre-figured the wartime Butler Act in suggesting that secondary education should be free and that class distinctions should be abolished. But it was to take a war and much destruction of life and property before this dream could take a concrete shape. War was to change the face of adult education in Cornwall as it was to change many other things. Perhaps the greatest days of the WEA were to be ushered in in its wake, as we shall see in the next chapter.

*F.L. Harris and Dr A.C. Todd*



*WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION*

FOWEY BRANCH

1920 — 1941

OFFICERS FOR SESSION 1940 - 1941—

| | |
|---|---|
| PRESIDENT .. | SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH |
| VICE-PRESIDENT .. | MR. T. H. L. HONY |
| CHAIRMAN .. | MR. I. D. SPREADBURY |
| VICE-CHAIRMAN .. | MR. R. C. ALLEN |
| LIBRARIAN .. | MISS D. B. GUNNING |
| JOINT SECRETARIES | MISS I. M. CUNDY and<br>MR. E. W. GODDEN |

JORY, PRINTER, FOWEY

*Fowey Branch booklet, showing Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch as President*

# CHAPTER THREE: THE TROUBLED YEARS: 1939-1953

GORDON McCALLUM

"Mr. Harris stressed the official view that educational movements must be kept going and therefore we must exert every effort to carry on our Adult Education which was a sound contribution to the National effort." (Camborne Branch A.G.M. Minutes 29th May 1940)

"At the moment of writing, 31st May 1940, the prospects of the W.E.A. are uncertain and no attempt can be made to foretell its work during 1940-41. However, we are sure that the movement is able to adapt itself to whatever conditions may arise and that our members may be relied upon to do their utmost to meet new situations and to continue their educational service to the community."

Conclusion to District Annual Report 1939-40.

The early war years were ones of an uncertain optimism in the W.E.A. An optimism that the nation would survive, that the WEA would continue and that the eventual post war world would be a better place. The question was, how could the WEA make a contribution both in defining and creating that better place.

## The WEA is Signed Up

The war presented immediate problems for the WEA.

New factors such as enlistments, removals, evacuation, widespread overtime, black-out and petrol shortages affected student and tutor recruitment and made organisation difficult. But more than this, the war would be a total war and the WEA was mobilised in the service of the State. The Ministry of Information, the BBC, the University and the WEA all combined as part of a civilian front. Initially, a business as usual approach may have helped in the sustenance of civilian morale. It is also possible to identify a WEA response through the changing programme of courses. Titles such as "Communism and Fascism", "The U.S.S.R. and Europe", "Germany and Europe", "Japan and the Far East" are prominent in the war time programme. Unfortunately syllabi for these courses are not available. However, it is reasonable to assume that a petrol pool for tutors and close ties with the Ministry of Information indicate that such courses would seek to explain and support government policy. In a limited number of cases, classes were run jointly with the Ministry of Information. Camborne/Redruth Branch hosted a lecture by Sir Ronald Storrs entitled "From Portugal to Persia in the Third Year of War", this was in conjunction with the Ministry of Information.

In many senses, however, the WEA in Cornwall was less affected by the war than the District as a whole. On the night of April 22nd/23rd 1941 Plymouth Chambers was completely destroyed by incendiary and explosive bombs. The WEA District Office, its equipment and records were entirely lost and an office was established in Totnes. Plymouth became a garrison town with a huge transient military population. The WEA quickly expanded its provision of education to H.M.Forces and was directly financed for this work. The programme was mainly single lectures and short courses, mostly in the Plymouth area, a number however were organised to service troops stationed in East Cornwall and air stations elsewhere. Many of these courses had associations with particular geographic areas. There seems to be no pattern to this provision and the programme was probably determined by the availability of tutors. One can only hope that some German spy tried to infer some strategic significance to the WEA programme to H.M.Forces with titles such as "Kemal and Turkey", "Lawrence of Arabia", "The Sierre Leone". Perhaps a major scheme of disinformation resulted as a consequence of the WEA's efforts. The secret war has many tentacles!

Fowey Branch took time out of war to celebrate its coming of age in 1941. The Branch Secretary, E.W.Godden, signalled the event with a conference tutored by Dr. A.L.Rowse who gave lectures on "Tudor Cornwall" and "Some Cornish Sailors". A booklet was also published listing the subjects studied over the twenty one years, and also WEA class members for that period. Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, the President of Fowey Branch provided a "Prefatory Note" to the booklet

One casualty of war was the classes arranged under the Workers' Education Trade Union Committee. Labour shortages and extensive overtime prevented most trade unionists attending courses and only a token number took place during the war years, mainly limited to one day conferences and single lectures. Some trade unionists, however, managed to attend branch classes.

In Devon the major wartime initiative had focussed on a provision for H.M.Forces and Civil Defence workers. In contrast, in Cornwall a joint initiative with the Local Education Authority sought to provide an educational dimension to the Youth Service. A Youth Education Organiser, Miss Phyllis (most usually known as "Phyll") Angove was appointed in 1941 and an expanding programme of courses was provided until 1946 when the LEA took on the responsibility and the redesignation of Miss Angove as WEA Area Organiser directed work back to the mainstream of adult provision. Three features of this work should be recorded, the significant number of courses with girls clubs, the informality of the methods employed and the attention given to courses on citizenship and current affairs. The WEA made an obvious contribution to a service which has since been much expanded and developed.

## Post War Growth

The end of the war found the WEA poised to enter a period of growth and reach a peak of provision which it was unable to equal for more than thirty years.

It is possible to argue that the WEA in Cornwall had established stronger and more diverse links with other organisations than at any time before or since. While clearly part of the educational establishment, its contacts with voluntary associations, youth organisations, Parish Councils, Churches, trade unions, womens institutes, Co-operative societies and provisions for industry clearly gave it a base within the community. The newly established weekend schools provided a mechanism for integrating the energies of students and full time tutors and created a forum for educational debate. This debate increasingly focussed on the need for a distinct Cornwall WEA operating as a separate district.

For the WEA the end of the war meant an expansion of full time staff, an influx of skilled part time tutors, a body of students, optimistic about the future and convinced that education was an effective and necessary tool to define and achieve that future. New structures also emerged. The most significant of these was the winding up of the "Cornwall Adult Education Joint Committee" and its replacement with a Committee which took responsibility for Joint University classes as well. Classes tutored by University Resident Tutors were not included in its area of responsibility. It is said, however, that the WEA District Secretary had difficulty in understanding this.

"This Committee was commenced in 1920 as a result of the WEA District's proposal to Cornwall LEA that formal adult educational work in the County could best be developed by establishing a Joint Committee of six representatives from each body, with joint honorary secretaries, on the basis that the WEA would organise the students, the LEA would find the money and that, together on the Joint Committee, they would appoint the tutors and run the classes under the Grant Regulations of the Board of Education. Similar joint committees of WEA and University representatives had run University courses for about 12 years previously, and it was this experience which led the Ministry of Reconstruction in its famous report on "Adult Education", published in 1919, to suggest that joint committees for non-university courses should be formed by the WEA and LEA's. The Cornwall Adult Education Committee however, was the only one formed, and it is unique'. (Annual Report 1945-46 WEA S.W.District).

## University Relationships

However, it was the University which showed the biggest expansion of personnel during this period. By 1948, five Resident Tutors had responsibility for areas of the County. The one tutor organiser employed by the WEA also had an area responsibility. For one year his area was mid-Cornwall and any impact he might have had was largely marginalised by his transfer to North Cornwall (at his request). A University Resident Tutor replaced him in Mid-Cornwall.

All of the University Resident Tutors had origins in and affections for the WEA. Their resident geographic responsibilities plus historic personal ties ensured that they had strong links with the WEA branches. They attended meetings, served on committees and acted as officers both of Branches and the Federation of Branches which emerged in this period. They were also active at District and National level. At this time it must have been difficult for them to separate their loyalties.

Four branches - Penzance, Falmouth, Camborne and Liskeard - formed the core of voluntary activity. University Resident Tutors were closely associated with each of these. It was from these branches that much of the pressure for change originated. A perception developed in Cornwall that the WEA at National and District level was stagnating and acting as a distant bureaucratic constraint on dynamic new structures and initiatives in Cornwall. It was felt that Cornwall retained a focus on quality of provision linked directly back to the Oxford tutorial tradition and at the same time could give a particular Cornish style to this provision through closer ties with local voluntary associations. Ultimately it was thought it could become the educational wing of these associations.

## Rumbles in the West

It is impossible at this distance to determine whether such ideas sprang from the voluntary movement or whether they were suggested and fostered entirely by the Resident Tutors. Given their close linkages however it is likely that both contributed to their development. The outcome was a feeling of frustration in Cornwall. This frustration, it was felt, could only be released by the creation of a separate District in Cornwall: a District free and able to develop a distinctive style and programme of adult education. At the AGM of the Camborne Branch in 1945, Miss Eustice reported on a District Conference of July 1944, "... there were very few present ..... and she was not inspired by the Conference."

The Minutes continue -

"A lively discussion took place on the subject of District organisation ... ... Mr Kelly asked whether the District could be divided into Devon and Cornwall with an Organiser for each ... ... and that other branches should be canvassed about this. It was agreed to ask Mr

F.L.Harris to draft a resolution coming from this meeting to this effect.''

The resolution was circulated and a conference of Branches was held in Truro on 8th December 1945. A sub-committee was established to consider the advisability of a separate District for Cornwall.

T.S.Attlee, the then Chairman of the South West District addressed the AGM of the Camborne Branch on "Some Problems of the WEA''. He argued that the District was too big for administrative convenience and too diverse to create a unified purpose. He strongly supported the creation of a separate district for Cornwall. He suggested a resolution be sent to District Office.

This was framed as "That steps be taken forthwith to have a separate District for Cornwall''. Mr F.L.Harris, in supporting the resolution, stated that the demand for a separate District was popular in Cornwall and that Central Office had said that the financial requirements could be met.

Despite this optimism the District Report for 1948-49 p.12 records that the District, in consultation with the National Organising Secretary, had decided that financial reasons made it impossible for a separate District to be formed. A Federation of branches had been suggested by the District as an "interim'' measure. The first meeting of the Federation took place on 2nd October 1948 in Truro with Gladys Malbon, Resident Tutor, as its first secretary.

This first attempt to create a separate district had been rebuffed and the seccessionists regrouped. The Federation was seen by them as a stepping stone to a separate

District. The S.W.District Office and the WEA tutor organiser, Jack Ravensdale, and the National Office however, regarded the Federation as a sop which would divert energies and hoped that with time the enthusiasm for a separate district would dissipate. This was not to be the case and the separation of Cornwall arose again in a more damaging episode in the fifties.

### Rumours of Independence

The basis of the energies for separation arose from a growing self-confidence generated by a diverse and extensive programme. If the war years saw the WEA mobilised as part of the home front, the latter years of the war and the early years of peace-time produced a programme which again reflects the times. Discussions of the Beveridge Report, debates on Post-war Reconstruction, the influence of education on a changing society dominated the programme.

In 1947-48 there were 18 students at Perranwell studying "The Citizen and the Constitution", 14 students in Saltash considered "Britains Food Supplies", 14 in Troon looking at "Aspects of the Post War World". In Bugle it was the Commonwealth which was examined and the "Economies of Reconstruction" were dealt with in Mount Charles, Par and Roche.

A wider county cover gradually developed with a full complement of five organisers reaching more than fifty centres in the county, many of which were distant and very rural. Successful lunch-time lectures given by Mr R.R.Blewett in the canteens of Climax in Camborne and Siley Cox in Falmouth attracted large numbers of employees and extended WEA provision into two of Cornwall's major industries.

There was an obvious desire to widen access to WEA courses and reach out to geographic and social groups previously isolated from provision. This widening of access was however still perceived in the context of maintaining quality of provision. Frequent reference is made to "Higher Type" of courses. This usually meant longer courses, making study demands on students and usually taught by a University Resident tutor. Shorter courses were accepted if they could be seen as "Pioneer" courses which broke ground and would eventually generate students for sessional courses and occasional three year tutorial courses and weekend schools. Most courses were however limited to one term and this reflects the reality of the time if not the aspirations of the tutors and voluntary members of the WEA.

Linked weekend schools were started in 1945/6 and steadily expanded in number until by the time of the HMI Report of 1950-51, seventeen weekend schools were run with a week long school at Easter.

This Residential provision was run in concert with a tutorial provision of four or five small groups and created space for committed students and adult education activists in the county. Demand was such that access had to be limited on the basis of academic achievement for some parts of the programme.

A twin track approach can be observed. There was a widening of the net to small communities and other educationally disadvantaged groups using the organisational structure of other voluntary associations in concert with the WEA. And from this widened catchment a body of committed students were recruited, motivated and able to engage in more serious study on longer, and where appropriate, residential courses.

It is clear that the WEA at this time became more than an educational body for many students and tutors. Through the emergent Federation and established week-end schools, social contacts were established which linked students throughout the County and via this network contact was developed with other voluntary bodies. The framework of this network was the University Resident Tutor system, each Resident Tutor linking into the senior Resident University Tutor to provide an organisational social framework which covered virtually the whole county. The one WEA tutor organiser limited to the mid-Cornwall area came to perceive himself a stranger in his own land and many of the suspicions and misunderstandings which subsequently arose can be traced to this organisational structure.

## The Cornish Troubles

The idea of a separate district did not go away. Mr Hurd (Liskeard Branch) as a guest speaker at Camborne Branch AGM of 1950 concluded his talk "... ... the future of adult education in Cornwall would be ensured by the formation of a separate District''. At Camborne AGM 1951, the Chairwoman, Miss L.A.Eustice in reporting on the work of the Federation said that ''... ... the Federation must be regarded as the first step toward working for a separate District''.

Those working for a separate District now seem to have recruited Sir Henry Slessor and T.S.Attlee to their view. For a number of years these two men were the most senior officers of the District. Their recruitment gave the pressure for independence sufficient momentum to be again considered at National level.

In response to this pressure the National Organising Secretary, Mr W. Gregory, visited the District Office at the end of 1951 and met the District Committee. He reported to the National Organising Committee on 12th December 1951. This meeting discussed the separation of Devon and Cornwall and decided to postpone meeting a deputation from the S.W.District and in the meantime asked Mr Gregory to obtain more information about the WEA in Cornwall.

Mr Gregory again visited Plymouth. This time his research was limited to discussions with the District Secretary Mr J.G.Trevena. Mr Trevena stated, "The Branch is not the main unit of organisation in Cornwall because of the County's sparse population!".

Mr Gregory's report goes on "The District Secretary conveyed the impression that he had no up-to-date detailed knowledge of Branch activity in Cornwall." The report details "Mevagissey and Fowey as merely classes, which did not operate as Branches and dismissed Penzance, Camborne/Redruth, Falmouth, St. Austell and Liskeard ... ... "I think they hold Branch meetings. (I have quoted the Secretary verbatim)".... "I received no information about the remaining nine Branches, although I asked for it. It was not forthcoming because the information was not available in the District Office."

On the basis of the above Mr Gregory came to a very definite conclusion. "Effective Branch organisation does not exist in Cornwall."

A cursory glance at District Annual reports - an examination of Falmouth or Camborne Branch Minutes of the time - some brief conversations with Branch Officers in Cornwall: any or all of these would have made it impossible for Mr Gregory to come to the conclusion he did.

It is difficult to look at this report without gaining the impression that either the District Secretary of the South West District had no knowledge of a large area of his responsibility and the National Organising Secretary had insufficient energy to travel beyond Plymouth, or that there was a measure of collusion between the two to produce a report which fitted the intentions of both the District Office and the National Office of the WEA.

The report does go on to identify some major financial difficulties. The financial difficulties of a separate district eventually become the basis of a rejection of the creation of a separate District. It is probably the case however that if an educational and organisational argument for a separate District had been accepted then the financial difficulties would have been overcome. This report fundamentally questioned the validity of an educational organisational argument and used finance as the excuse for refusal.

Eventually the National Organising Committee met a deputation from the South West District on the 18th of

April 1952. This deputation was originally to include Sir Henry Slessor the District Chairman. He withdrew, citing health grounds, and was replaced by Mr L.J.Christy, representing Cornish Branches joining Gladys Malbon, Resident Tutor and Federation Secretary and member of the NEC, and Mr J.G.Trevena, South West District Secretary.

The evidence presented for a separate district was very strong on imponderables such as enthusiasm, commitment, dynamism, all of which were waiting to be released by the creation of a separate District which the record states was intended to arise on 1st June 1952 with an incumbent District Secretary by 1954. The financial presentation was however very weak. The figures presented were estimates which made generous assumptions about income and even on the basis of such generous assumptions showed a significant shortfall between forecast income and expenditure.

The record of the meeting indicates a poor presentation of the case. Some indication of how the meeting must have gone is given by the concluding sentence. "Miss Malbon said without equivocation that she could not accept responsibility for what happened if the request for a separate District for Cornwall was rejected."

A poorly presented case coupled with a scarcely veiled threat was not designed to win over a committee. This committee had already been given a damning report by the National Organising Secretary and had also been subjected to much informal negative lobbying.

## Independence Denied

The request for a separate District was turned down. It is likely that this had been the intention all along but "Democracy" had been served.

At one level this episode can be seen as a battle between two sets of professionals. On the one hand the National Office, the District Office and the one full time WEA Tutor Organiser in Cornwall and on the other hand the five University Resident Tutors. Both sides claimed the heart, the soul and the future of the WEA as legitimacy for their actions.

The Resident Tutors, through teaching and organisation, claimed a direct relationship and knowledge of the mass of students. They also filled key posts as officers in Branch, Federation, District and National Committees. They were numerous, energetic, and committed to a distinct view of adult education. For full time employees of the WEA their position of influence without direct WEA responsibility can only have seemed threatening. In so far as the pressure for a separate District was identified with the University tutors it was damned from the start.

At another level it can be argued that grass roots pressure from a buoyant voluntary movement was stamped on by a distant insensitive bureaucracy.

On balance what can be said is that pressure for separation did exist within the voluntary movement. Branch and Federation records indicate this. It is probable that the Resident tutors were however significant influences in initiating, co-ordinating and sustaining this pressure. It would also seem true that National and

District Officers of the WEA showed themselves to be insular, less than fully concerned and totally lacking in the skills or imagination which could have re-directed the pressures and tensions in Cornwall from an almost entirely destructive path. It is fairly clear now that an opportunity was missed in the early fifties. Much damage was done. Relationships with the University and the Local Educational Authority became progressively more distant. The WEA lost the opportunity to establish itself as the significant provider of adult education in the County. Although care would have been required to ensure that it did not merely become the agent of other institutions. Many WEA activists became disaffected and (either immediately or after a decent interval) withdrew from the movement. The Resident Tutors directed their energies elsewhere and many students were left entirely bemused. The most frequent statement from students of that time is - "I knew there were problems, but I had no idea what was going on."

Rumours and echoes of this time reach down to the present day and there were personal casualties as well. In the flak that flew around, accusations of personal academic and political impropriety became the common currency of both sides. Some of the protagonists felt it necessary at times to take legal advice. It is difficult now to understand the levels of passion aroused by the issue of separation. It does seem however that a measure of self righteousness coloured the actions of both sides. This self righteousness gave vindication to the adoption of questionable tactics. Both sides seem to have been prepared to operate secretively, to be economical with the truth and be prepared if necessary, to use personal smears as a justifiable tool. All of this being done to further the interests, if not of the WEA on its own, then Adult Education in general.

## The Dust Refuses to Settle

Audrey Purser, the University Resident Tutor for Mid-Cornwall tried to bridge both sides and in the end suffered the most. She was eventually given notice by the University. The final reason for her dismissal was given as "an inability to work with other tutors." No one who knew her can conceive that this was the case. This incident did not affect her career and she continued to work in adult education at Hillcroft Residential College until, sadly she was killed in a car accident.

The dismissal of Miss Purser created even more rancour and tested University WEA relations. Miss Purser's dismissal was a fairly long drawn out episode. In Cornwall the feeling became established that matters could only be resolved by some departures from the fray and in a sense Miss Purser can be seen as the sacrificial lamb. Sir Henry Slessor, T.S.Attlee and a grouping of Cornish Branch officers, with the University Resident tutors in Cornwall lined up on the side encouraging Miss Purser's departure. The District Secretary of the WEA and the District Treasurer, E.W.Godden challenged the right of the University to sack an employee of the Joint Committee for Adult Education.

At the District Council meeting on March 21st 1953, an addendum to a motion was passed. "That the Council of the College be asked to suspend action on the termination of Miss Purser's appointment pending the results of an enquiry by the Tutorial Class Committee.''

On this issue the Chairman and the Vice Chairman resigned. The Falmouth delegates walked out of the meeting. The Penzance delegates, although supporting the motion, also walked out saying ''... ... this was the end of the WEA in Cornwall and that the LEA would take over''.

Alderman Harry Mason of Plymouth was elected to the Chair.

This Council meeting set the scene for an even greater coup de theatre at the AGM in July. Harry Williams, the Plymouth Tutor Organiser at the time, attended the meeting and recalled it with some pleasure.

"This proved to be the most (the only?) exciting AGM of the thirty odd I attended. It was certainly a packed meeting, in both senses of the term. Every Cornish Branch and group arrived with its full allowance of representatives, many who had never before attended an AGM and never did again. Some of them, to whom I talked afterwards, had no idea what was at issue. Victory for Cornwall looked certain until John Sewell, Tutor Organiser for Exeter, who had been researching into the District Constitution, proposed that card votes should be used. This provided votes to branches according to their membership, and since Plymouth Branch had 300 members and Exeter 180 they could together outvote the rest of the meeting.''

The card vote was used to very good effect at the election of Officers and the District Executive Committee. Of the seven Cornish District representatives in 1952 (two of whom were University Resident Tutors) only three remained after the elections in 1953. The Treasurer, E.W.Godden, L.J.Christy and the Rev. P.P.W. Gendall. As Godden had always taken the District line and Christy and Gendall were associated with Ravensdale's areas, a virtual clean sweep was affected.

## Damage Limitation

Much wound licking followed in Cornwall with some guerilla action. Falmouth Branch for example voted to suspend all voluntary payments to the District. Camborne Branch passed a motion deploring the resignation of Sir Henry Slesser and T.S.Attlee and reaffirmed their support for the three Cornwall Federation Representatives.

The AGM of the Cornwall Federation was postponed in 1954 and the Federation virtually suspended pending a District enquiry. It was also mooted by the District Executives that the Federation should be split into three area committees. This was resisted, but a new constitution for the Federation was produced and accepted by the District in 1956.

The District had clearly exercised and established its authority. The idea of a separate District in Cornwall was finally killed. A damage limitation exercise was now required. Instead of proposing a separate Cornwall District, Branch resolutions now complained about the lack of representation on Cornish Committees. A Resolution from Falmouth Branch, June 1954 read that -

a) "In view of proposals for discussion with other responsible bodies on Educational policy in Cornwall, this branch committee stresses to District Officers concerned, that it is in entire agreement, as a WEA Branch, with the policy developed in the County in the past years, and is convinced that this is the opinion of at least a great majority of students in the County: it would deplore any pressure to modify that policy in any important way against the wishes of students in Cornwall.

b) This Committee expressed its concern at the seriously unrepresentative nature of the WEA side on the Cornwall Adult Education Joint Committee, and calls for a representation that shall more truly and obviously express the experience and views of different areas in the county and prevailing opinion in matters of policy.''

A measure of exhaustion, some resignations and retirements, thinned the ranks of the protagonists on both sides. New appointments tried to avoid carrying any luggage from the past, and for a time the WEA concentrated on the provision of adult education. It must be said however that in Cornwall some of the excitement had gone. It is unlikely that a Trelawney's army will ever again face tactical defeat at a WEA District Annual General Meeting.

Professor Roger Fieldhouse in his article "The WEA and the Universities Since the War'' printed in Vol. 3, No. 6 1988/89 'Workers Education', paints a broader picture, but cites the Cornish Troubles as symptomatic of a general conflict between University Extra Mural Departments and the WEA. His article describes the expansion of Extra Mural departments in the postwar period and a diversion of their energies into the provision of shorter courses. The WEA had come to consider the provision of shorter courses as its legitimate territory and perceived this as an attempt to force the WEA out of business.

Professor Fieldhouse is clearly aware that in Cornwall it was not simply a straight University/WEA fight over who should run shorter courses but remains convinced that it was this fight which created the background to the "Troubles" and provided its main stimulus.

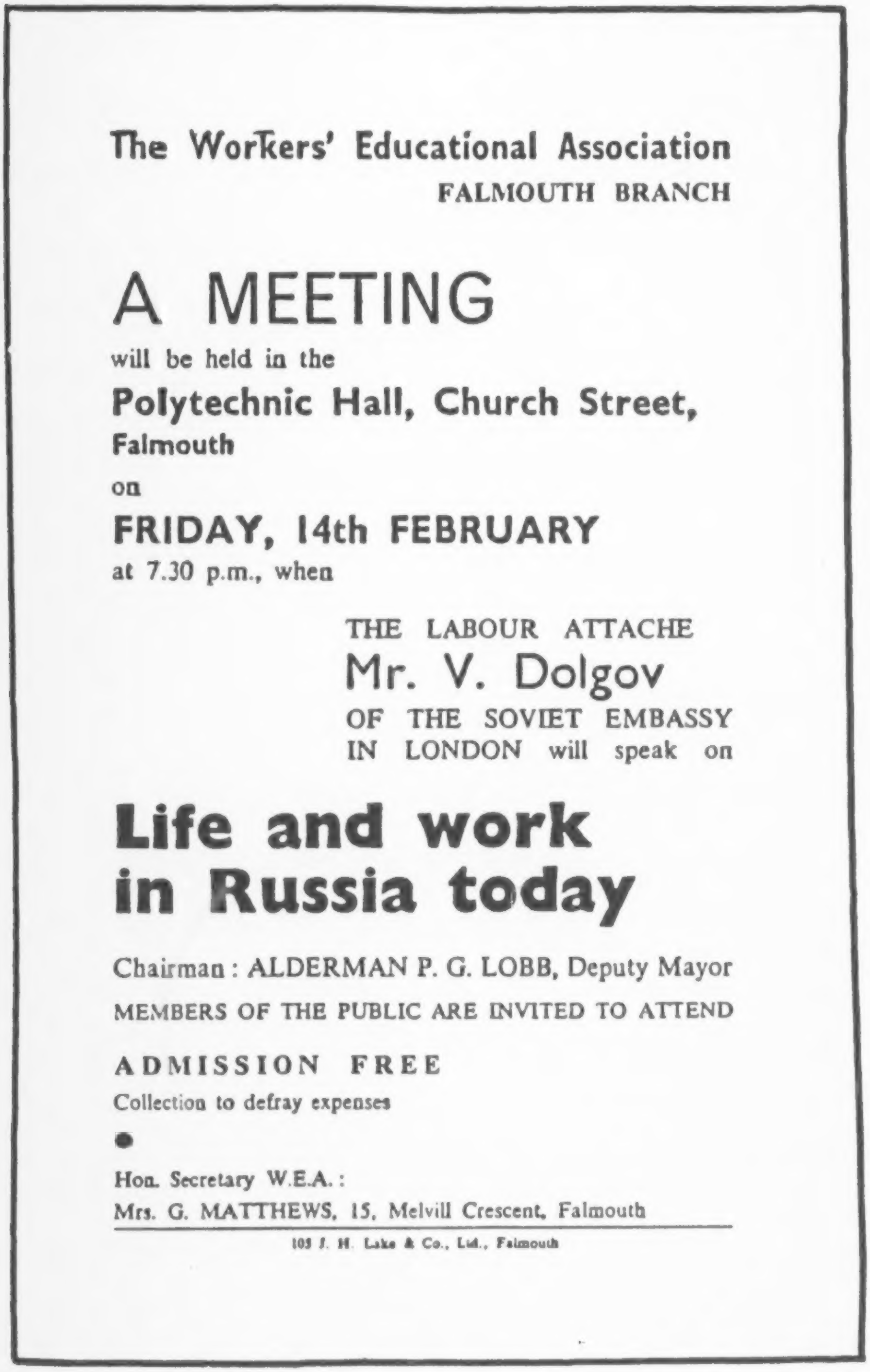
What is difficult to reconcile with this view is the strategy which seems to have been adopted by the University tutors in Cornwall. The majority of these tutors were supportive of the idea of a separate WEA District for Cornwall and invested much time and energy in an attempt to achieve separation. If the University in Cornwall is to be accused of anything it is not so much of an attempt to squeeze the WEA out but more of an attempt to take it over.

As a footnote to this Chapter it is of some interest to read in the report made to Falmouth Committee on the District AGM of 1953 -

"The action of Ald. Mason, the Chairman in proposing that certain paragraphs in the Annual Report relating to the recent troubles in Cornwall be entirely deleted was very salutary."

This is the earliest reference to the title "Cornish Troubles" which since that time has become part of unrecorded WEA history and myth. Few organisations fail to record the resignation of their Chairman and Vice-Chairman, especially if they are a retired Attorney

General and the brother of a recent Prime Minister!



**The Workers' Educational Association**
**FALMOUTH BRANCH**

# A MEETING

will be held in the
**Polytechnic Hall, Church Street,**
**Falmouth**
on
**FRIDAY, 14th FEBRUARY**
at 7.30 p.m., when

THE LABOUR ATTACHE
## Mr. V. Dolgov
OF THE SOVIET EMBASSY
IN LONDON will speak on

# Life and work in Russia today

Chairman : ALDERMAN P. G. LOBB, Deputy Mayor
MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ARE INVITED TO ATTEND

**ADMISSION FREE**
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Hon. Secretary W.E.A. :
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# CHAPTER FOUR: Calm After the Storm: 1954-1969

GORDON McCALLUM

The retirement of J.G.Trevena in July 1954 and the arrival of Reg. Jefferies as the new District Secretary marked a significant break not just with the past but with the very origins of the WEA. By 1954 Trevena had worked for 40 years with the WEA. After working for five years as District Secretary in the North East he came to the South West and was the first and only Secretary for the thirty five years to his retirement. J.R.Ravensdale resigned and the North Cornwall Tutor Organiser's post was not filled. G.G.Gough became the new WEA Tutor Organiser and he was assigned to a mid-Cornwall territory.

A subcommittee of the District Committee enquired into WEA activities in Cornwall and reported in 1954. No copy of this report now exists, but from references in various Minutes it recommended that ways should be found to promote full co-operation with associated bodies.

An enquiry undertaken - anodyne recommendations made, changed personnel, all contributed to a new reality, and the WEA in Cornwall entered a quieter phase.

## Oxford Linkages

Both Jefferies and Gough were Oxford graduates and to some extent they reinforce the relationship between

Cornwall WEA and Oxford University. Many of the University Tutors in Cornwall had close contacts with Oxford and a number of students enjoyed the summer schools arranged in conjunction with the University. A surprisingly large number took up Ruskin College scholarships in the postwar period. In 1954 Jack Taylor won a place at Ruskin College by submitting an essay in answer to the question - "What factors should be considered in deciding whether an industry should be nationalised or brought under some other form of public control?" After a successful career in management in the public sector, finally as Personnel Manager at Panteg Steel Works, Jack Taylor returned to St. Austell to become once more active in the WEA. He is at present, 1990, Chairman of the St. Austell Branch. Jack Taylor was one of a number of British Rail workers from the Par Depot who were active in the WEA as students, tutors and committee members. Many entered formal education via Ruskin or Coleg Harlech.

Distance learning was also alive and well in Cornwall in 1955 when Mr Sidney Pink of Penzance Branch won a Robert Addy Hopkinson Scholarship to Ruskin through private study on the Longships Light House. His study and reading was supported by A.C.Todd, the University Tutor for West Cornwall.

A temporary University Tutor in West Cornwall is remembered for insisting that students dissect bullocks eyes in class. His appointment was fortunately only temporary.

## Summer and Weekend Schools

The Weekend Schools continued through the fifties, coming to an end in the middle sixties. Newquay was the main location but the concept was tried elsewhere at various times with Falmouth also operating as an effective centre. F.L.Harris acted as Director of Studies and Miss P.M.Angove was the organising tutor.

The HMI report for 1961-62 records -

"The value of the weekend schools can hardly be overestimated. Collectively they represent adult education in the county at its highest level ..."

The report commends the organisational and teaching skills of the tutors but seemed finally unconvinced that the aspirations of the students and teachers were fully realised. The inspectors pointed to the difficulties of organisation and accommodation and mused as to whether a residential structure of linked weekends provided the same disciplined study as the more regular provision of sessional and tutorial classes.

Whatever the reservation of Inspectors, the students certainly enjoyed the weekends and remember them with affection.

Betty Rule, the present Secretary of Camborne Branch, recalls -

"A successful venture was the organisation of weekend schools at Newquay. These were held at the end of each

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month for class members. These were not luxury weekends - for example - the History Group was allocated the gamesroom - and one winter it was so cold that we were all issued with a grey army blanket to wrap in, as we sat in a semicircle in deck chairs. During that winter it was so cold that the edge of the sea was frozen. After dinner we all went for a long hike to keep warm often finishing our walk at the Farmers Arms in St. Columb Minor. No doubt the locals in the pub thought we were a queer lot as our conversations usually turned to what we had been discussing in class. If the weather was bad we would stay in after dinner. Most people would bring along something to occupy themselves, knitting, sewing or a book to read. One evening, one of the trade union students - a very large manual worker - said, "Everybody seems to be doing something, I might as well fetch my embroidery". No one took him seriously, but he was soon back with a beautiful piece of embroidery which he happily occupied himself with for the rest of the evening.

"At Easter weekends we all went trigging. This is an old custom in Cornwall which continues to the present day. We went armed with hessian bags and filled them with mussels and limpets and took them back to the Hotel to be boiled up for tea."

Betty Rule continues:-

"Summer Schools were also popular with many of us. The value of these was, in my view, the discipline of a particular study. One's chosen subject was invariably allied to studies in the classes at home. These schools were held in Oxford, although eventually I favoured Cambridge. One of the most valuable things about these schools was meeting WEA students from all over the country, and many from abroad. Another thing was that household names became "people". After the end of a session at Cambridge, the tutor said that E.M.Forster, the author, was interested in the subject of our particular class, "Social History in Victorian Times as reflected in Literature" and we were invited to his rooms at Kings, where eight of us spent a most enjoyable afternoon. At the same school one of the visiting speakers was the Provost of Kings (now Lord Annan) and again there was the same informality. Another evening the Dean of Kings, Dr. Alec Vidler came to the common room and we had a most stimulating and amusing time. At Oxford, too, we came under the influence of distinguished speakers - Raymond Williams, Hugh Gaitskill etc., but Oxford Schools were much larger, so that it seemed we kept meeting new people all the time."

## The Development Scheme

The decade of the fifties was one of contraction - numbers of students, courses and meetings almost halved by the end of the period.

Much of the blame for this contraction was attributed to the decline of the WEA activists and also to an uncertain commitment and high turnover of full time WEA Tutor Organisers in Mid-Cornwall. The University Tutors felt that they could no longer sustain their organising efforts in the face of criticism from the University and the Inspectorate that they should be more involved in higher level teaching and less in organisation. The failure of the WEA to provide an organisational structure within the county encouraged the University Tutors to look elsewhere and two strategies were employed. The first was to employ what became known as "The Development Scheme". This scheme was designed as a taster exercise in which part-time tutors and University tutors arranged short courses with voluntary organisations in the county. It was envisaged that this would act as a demonstration of adult education and encourage voluntary associations to provide an organisational framework and act as agents for adult education in general and the University in particular. In a sense providing the service which the University Tutors felt the WEA should provide.

During this period of contraction the local authority provided continued and stable support to the University tutors and this support was obviously reinforced when the senior Resident Tutor became a County Councillor. The other tactic attempted was to create an appointment - that of a Local Education Authority Tutor Organiser. Both these tactics sought to fill a vacuum created by the declining WEA Branch activity, and lack of continuity and support provided by WEA full time tutors who changed frequently and were limited to the Mid-Cornwall area.

The Development Scheme sprang directly from the Cornwall Joint Adult Education Committee Memorandum of 1955. This memorandum argued that work -

"properly falling to full time tutors (University Tutors) should include co-operation with voluntary organisations, an appropriate part in developing informal work with these associations, and other work which is likely to make a foundation for regular classes.''

This memorandum thus gave direction and authority to the University tutors and especially for F.L.Harris, the Senior Resident Tutor who was given responsibility for the work, to devote energies to activity which was largely organisational. By its very definition the Development Scheme provided very short courses, often only one lecture, at what could only have been an introductory level.

The involvement of the University in such work, at this time, could only have been controversial. The Inspectors' report of 1961-62 quickly picks up on the Development Scheme. It was clearly implied in this report that the Inspectors were unconvinced that the organisation of short introductory courses should be part of University responsible body activity. The report commends the work but indicates that it was more clearly the responsibility of the Local Authority.

The report also goes on to say -

"It must be remarked that the WEA is not as conspicuous either in its teaching or its organisation, as it should be if the 'voluntary principle' is to retain its accepted place in adult education. And the contribution of the LEA valuable as it is, remains primarily financial and administrative, though the moral support and influence that this brings should not be underestimated.''

The Inspectors' report can now be seen to be implicitly prescriptive. In the context of student numbers being halved in one decade there was a need to examine the basic organisation of adult education in the County. The Inspectors clearly direct the University and its Tutors toward their historic role of the provision of longer courses of more serious study and questions why the WEA and the Local Authority were not more active in the county. Development work is seen by the Inspectorate as clearly the responsibility of the WEA and the LEA. The University is slapped on the wrist for being misdirected, the WEA and LEA are more seriously charged with being inactive.

## The Local Education Authority

One of the first responses to the report was the appointment of Miss Hunter in 1963 as a Tutor Organiser for liberal non-vocational education employed by the LEA but responsible directly to the Cornwall Adult Education Joint Committee. This Committee, uniquely a Responsible Body in its own right, had obviously taken the Inspectors' report seriously and in making this appointment clearly laid down a challenge to both the Universities and the WEA.

The appointment acted as a major stimulus to the WEA. The immediate response was to use the Federation to stimulate branch activity and generate new branch organisation in places previously without provision. The District Annual reports, previously dominated by University Tutor contributions, have a more distinct WEA flavour with reference made to the University Tutors rather than giving them the opportunity to make separate reports.

In 1963, the Development Scheme was formally ended and Barry Long was appointed to replace Miss Briscoe as WEA Tutor Organiser. Miss Hunter resigned her LEA appointment and Barry Long was given responsibility for WEA activity in the whole county. Within two years this widened responsibility showed results - the late sixties showed a resurgence of activity. This resurgence was however bedevilled by continuously high turnover of tutor organisers and the absence of any full time WEA staff for twelve months in 1968-69.

Miss Hunter's appointment produced a positive response from the WEA. Both the University and the WEA however reacted defensively as well and identified Miss Hunter's appointment as a serious threat.

A report titled "Liberal Adult Education" 1963 states the position clearly.

Miss Hunter's terms of reference cut across the activities of the four University and one WEA tutors. This could only occur through the Responsible Body status of the Cornwall Adult Education Joint Committee.

The report states that if, "following the resignation of Miss Hunter, a further appointment of similar calibre and aspiration was made this would mean the virtual disappearance of the WEA in Cornwall."

The WEA came to the view that the Cornwall Adult Education Joint Committee should cease to exist and be replaced by a consultative committee. The WEA Executive Committee passed a resolution on September 13th

1965, ... "In accordance with a decision reached by its Executive Committee, the S.W. District of the WEA hereby gives notice of its intention to withdraw from the Cornwall Adult Education Committee at the end of the Academic Year 1964-65."

This step was fully approved by Professor Sellon of the University of Exeter Extra-Mural Department and by H.M.I. Beevers.

## Changing Roles

The late sixties showed a new and evolving relationship between the now separate responsible bodies of the WEA and the University. Cornwall LEA continued with an adult education appointment, Mr Patrick Keene. The nature of his responsibilities seem however to have been vaguely defined, he was at various times described as a tutor organiser and at others as an adult education advisor. The continuation of the appointment is important, however, as it formed the basis for the gradual and necessary creation of a separate and distinctive LEA contribution to adult education. During the next twenty years this contribution expanded until in the eighties the Local Authority was by far the biggest provider of Adult Education in the County.

The replacement of Barry Long by Archie Donald as Tutor Organiser in January 1966 signalled little change in the direction of the WEA. Both of these Tutor Organisers actively strove to establish a distinctive role for the WEA and a sound organisational branch framework. In some ways it proved difficult to provide a clear separation between the University classes and the WEA. Both bodies aspired to quality and in particular the WEA Tutor Organisers sought to emphasise the quality and level of provision.

Barry Long established a three year tutorial class in the Social Sciences in St. Austell and Archie Donald went to the extent of defining the levels of his own classes in the 1966/67 report as pass degree standard, A-level, second year honours level, first year pass degree level. In 1964 attempts were also made by the University Tutor for Penzance and Miss M. Hunter to create a three year tutorial in Art and Architecture with a WEA part-time tutor A.E.Andrews in Falmouth. This was seen as inappropriate by the Falmouth Branch Committee and effectively stopped. A little later the same tutor was again to find himself in difficulty when his attempt to introduce some practical work into his Art Appreciation class was viewed with suspicion by the Department of Education and Science. The class was visited by an HMI to ensure that regulations were being observed. A ruling that limited practical work was allowable is one of the earliest signs of a cracking in the rigid regulations limiting the responsible bodies to liberal non-vocational provision.

As always geography played its part in Cornwall. The resurgence in the number of courses in 1967 exposed the difficulties of operating with only one tutor organiser in the County and the case for another tutor organiser was put to the Department of Education and Science. It was intended that the new tutor organiser would look after East and North Cornwall at that time administered directly, if somewhat superficially, by the District Office. The Department of Education and Science along with the

University supported the Application. When the Cornwall Education Authority were approached for financial assistance for the appointment it was not surprising that they found themselves unable to help. It was only a matter of three or four years since the WEA, the University and the Department of Education and Science had strongly criticised the Local Authority for making an appointment in Adult Education. The Authority can perhaps be forgiven for finding it difficult to understand why a local authority appointment was unacceptable one year and an extra WEA appointment was necessary only a few years later. This attitude also again marks a growing independence in perception by the Local Authority. It can perhaps now be seen that a growing separation between the three adult education bodies during the sixties was a benign tendency. A clearer identity for each began to emerge and any problems of competition, overlap and waste of resources proved to be marginal. It was possible for all three not only to survive but to expand into areas untouched by Adult Education in the past. This is not to say that problems did not arise (some have been referred to) at that time, and later. It became necessary, for example, for the University and the WEA to consider what style of programme and level of study they were providing to ensure that when they covered the same geographic and subject area they did not involve themselves in wasteful duplication. For the Local Authority it was the beginning of a learning exercise and acceptance of responsibility as it began to experiment with structures and appointments which would eventually lead to it being a separate and dominant partner in the provision of adult education.

## Students, Tutors and Branches

Students in WEA classes only slowly recognised the emergence of a separation in the three bodies. The intermingling of the WEA, the University and the Local Authority was a deep seated phenomenon and Falmouth WEA Branch Minutes refer to Miss Phyl Angove, a University Tutor and Miss Hunter an LEA Tutor Organiser as "our Tutor Organisers". When a new Tutor Organiser visited a Joint University/WEA class put on by Camborne Branch in 1969, the Camborne Branch Chairman and class secretary, and the Tutor, questioned whether the new WEA Tutor Organiser had the right to visit a University Theology Class. The issue was clarified by a Scottish statement never previously considered in a Theology class.

WEA Branches during the sixties did not limit their activities to the provision of classes. Falmouth Branch, for example, ran weekly discussion groups on current issues in the early sixties. No tutors were needed for these groups which operated effectively using the students own resources. Musical evenings of an informal nature added to the provision of music appreciation classes. A number of branches also grouped together to arrange recitals by visiting soloists. The Federation continued to provide some county-wide events and in particular an Annual Rally which brought members from all over the county to hear people such as Dr A.L.Rowse. Such activity was, however, sporadic and most activity during the sixties was based within branches but with strong representation from Cornwall on the District Committee with nearly half the District Executive Committee drawn from Cornwall.

The District Treasurer E.W.Godden retired in 1966 after decades in the job. Throughout the problems of the fifties he provided a steadying hand and used his influence to keep Cornwall as part of the South West District. E.W.Godden, Ivor Spreadbury and Claude Little, three masters at Fowey Grammar School, were instrumental in establishing the Fowey Branch in 1920. Godden was Secretary of the Fowey Branch from the first class and for more than fifty years. Sir Arthur, and later Foy, Quiller Couch were Presidents of the Branch. Mrs Treffry was Vice President in 1970 when the Branch celebrated its half century, and many classes were held at Place then and later.

Other Branches such as Falmouth presented a more radical and less patrician face. S.B.Hough, a local writer, with a long involvement with the WEA in the North, came on to the Falmouth Committee and became Chairman in 1967. He was later to become a stimulating and much regarded tutor of Creative Writing. At that time, however, his main concern along with others was to retain the voluntary dynamic of the WEA and to try and ensure that its programme reached out to minority groups within the town on the one hand and on the other to attract stimulating and controversial speakers in the Arts, social sciences and current affairs to the town. The branch also established close ties with Falmouth Polytechnic, the oldest Philosophical Society in the country with a long tradition of concern with adult education going back well into the 19th century.

Classes for the trade unions were re-established in the sixties with evening classes and linked weekend schools in Falmouth. In 1966-67 evening classes for trade union students were organised in St. Austell, Penzance and Falmouth and they became an established part of class provision with trade union representation on St. Austell, Falmouth, Penzance and Truro Branch Committees.

In 1963, Falmouth Branch made Mr W.H.Griffiths a Life Member of the Branch. Mr Griffiths represented the radical conscience of the WEA in Cornwall. A shipwright in Falmouth Docks he was sacked for trade union and political activities and despite remaining unemployed for a very long period stuck to his Marxist views and always tried to ensure that the WEA programme in Falmouth had a critical radical dimension. At a much later date Mr Griffiths became a student in this writer's class in Falmouth, as did Harold Tregilgas in St. Austell and Henry James in Calstock - three very elderly Cornish Marxists each convinced they were the last ones left. They were all vastly reassured to learn of the other's continued existence and entered into a correspondence with this writer as messenger. They are all now dead and Cornwall is a less varied and interesting place without them.

Many branches continued to provide one off schools, usually on Saturday afternoons. They often focused on a Cornish subject but occasionally they would bring in speakers of national or even international importance. In 1964 a very big audience in Falmouth came to listen to

Mr V. Dolgov, the Labour Attache at the Soviet Embassy in London, talk on "Life and Work in Russia today".

A remarkable feature of Cornwall after the war years was the long and continuous service given by a number of full time tutors. Longest serving of all was Fred Harris, he spent nearly forty years in adult education working initially for the WEA and later for the University as its Senior Resident Tutor. Dr. Todd spent over thirty years for the University in Penzance. Gladys Malbon, later Harris, worked for twenty years in East Cornwall and Phyl Angove, also had twenty years in Redruth. All of these tutors are remembered with real affection by their students. It is also true that they made a significant contribution to the WEA. They involved themselves in Branch and District organisation and were instrumental in guiding the WEA. At times their views were controversial and brought them into conflict with others of different persuasions. In many senses this conflict was a clear sign of life and they injected some commitment and passion into a continuous debate about adult education in the County.

During the same time a number of part time tutors gave great service to the WEA. Dr Frank Turk is remembered for his enormous learning and the support he gave to serious students in a multitude of classes across Cornwall. His ability to reach isolated villages by public transport is a tribute to his stamina and logistical ability. Andy Andrews took his comprehensive knowledge of European Architecture all over Cornwall. Many people gained their first real appreciation of Eastern Europe through following Andy's pictorial presentation of the buildings hiding behind what was then a very iron curtain. Cecil or "Birdy" Stevens, the gentle engine driver from Par, could easily become a permanent feature of any branch programme as students would not let him go. He must be the only tutor ever to take students on a fieldtrip on a train which the tutor was driving himself and stopping on the branch line every so often to point out interesting birds on the way.

Frank Turk remembers him as student and colleague -

"Your mention of C.J.Stevens brought to me so vividly "Remembrance of Things Past" to use Proust's phrase and equally in Proust's sense. I first met Cecil Stevens in 1937 or 1938 at a class in Par or St. Austell. He had then just qualified as a G.W.R. engine driver and had already entered into a lifelong love-affair with Learning such as one seldom encounters now but which was fairly common among working-men (and some women!) in the 1930's. As a result of scouting activities he already had a good knowledge of Natural History and was always keen to acquire more. As a class member he was invaluable since, more than anyone I ever knew, except the late "Dick" Blewett (also a WEA tutor in the war years) he had the power to pass on his enthusiasm to others. From the first he supplied me with written work beyond what was asked. In the early war years Cecil often drove the Newquay branch train and, whilst awaiting the "up line" train in which I travelled to a class, he would leave the foot-plate, run across the platform and hand me his latest essay, receiving from me the corrected one of the previous week. Later, that was to be repeated many times at Bodmin Road Station.

After the war, following John Burley's adult scholarship to Oxford to study zoology, Cecil tried for a government Adult Scholarship: the essay he submitted was described to me by Prof. Pantin (Cambridge) as "outstanding" but unfortunately an "attack of nerves" made him totally unable to speak in the viva-voce examination in London. In later life he travelled widely in Canada and Africa, all the time studying wildlife in the field and this made him in great demand as a tutor. A self-effacing, gentle man he was to die at a comparatively early age of cancer of the bladder - the exact disease he had feared all his life. Such were our joys and triumphs in the "Urwelt" of the WEA in Cornwall." [F.A.Turk 5.6.1990]

Two national issues arose in the sixties which were strongly and successfully resisted in Cornwall. Both arose from a Working Party Report in 1966 when, firstly, the idea of Regionalisation was raised. This would have meant a merger of the Western and South Western District with an office in Bristol. This was anathema to Cornish Branches not long finished considering Cornish seccession. Secondly, it was suggested that Central Office should nationally negotiate and receive all grants from the Department of Education and Science for later onward disbursement to each District.

Regionalisation is once more in 1990, a subject of discussion, and partial control of government funds has recently been achieved by Central Office. Creeping centralisation and aggregation was seen in the past as unhelpful to areas distant from the centre. It will require continuous vigilance and energy to maintain the level of devolved control which remains in areas such as Cornwall.

To a large extent the traumas of the early fifties are overcome by the late sixties. Two energetic tutor organisers with responsibility for the whole county were able to provide a more rationalised support for a recovering branch network and the level of class activity again increased. It was therefore very unfortunate that when Archie Donald resigned in 1968 it was nearly twelve months before he was replaced and much of the recovery achieved was lost. Attempts were made to appoint a second tutor organiser in Cornwall in 1967 and to have none at all in 1969 is at least curious. At the same time Dr. Todd, the West Cornwall University Staff Tutor on leave in America also decided to retire. F.L.Harris resigned a little later in 1969 and with the winding up of the "Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes" in the same year a clear sense emerges of the end of an era in Cornwall.

*WEA tutors (clockwise from top left): Tom Attlee (brother of Prime Minister Clem Attlee); Lord Asa Briggs; Dr A.L. Rowse; Arthur Scargill*

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# CHAPTER FIVE: NEW FACES, NEW THEMES: 1970-1989

JOHN HURST

As the WEA moved towards the completion of its first half-century one of the Founding Fathers of the movement, R.H.Tawney spoke of the two pillars of the Association as its "working-class foundations" and the "solidity and genuineness of its work". He also pointed toward the need, if the Association is to be true to itself, for it not to be led into "providing education for those who can most easily be induced to undertake it" instead of "for those who need it most".

There is, I imagine, no-one in the Association who would doubt the essential truth of these words. There would, however, be many who might argue that, in the changed economic, social and educational climate of modern Britain the task is more not less difficult than in the "great days" when Tawney and Mansbridge were active.

In many ways the story of the Association in Cornwall, is the story of how it has adjusted itself to carry out some, at least, of the tasks indicated by Tawney.

The essence of the WEA might be seen differently to the way Tawney presents it. It could be said that the Association's twin faces are to be seen in its classes and in the democratic structure of Branch and District

Committees which produce and administer those classes. The changing character of that profile also tells the story clearly.

The scene is a class in a village school in Penwith. Time about 1970. Fifteen or so people - more women than men, although with a good sprinkling of the latter, are studying the Art and Architecture of Central Europe. The Tutor is a dynamic school-teacher Andy Andrews, with an encyclopaedic knowledge of European Art, and a collection of slides - all taken by himself, during his travels - to match. During the class he illustrates a point of artistic technique with paint and brush, and encourages class members to do the same. He is afterwards reproved by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors for this as "sailing dangerously near the wind" with regard to the Responsible Body Regulations.

The scene is a class held in a private house in Feock. Students, again more women then men, come from a remarkable distance, travelling weekly throughout the winter - for this is a University Tutorial Class, arranged jointly by the WEA and the University - from places as far as Delabole and Camelford. The subject is the Art and Culture of China and Japan, and the tutor, that remarkable polymath, Dr. Frank Turk, equally distinguished as orientalist and biologist. The subject matter is detailed and workmanlike. Students take notes avidly and many produce written work in a variety of forms, from essays to poems on relevant themes.

The scene is a classroom in a Truro school. Men and women are in almost equal numbers - and the class has a marked practical and creative bent, the subject being Creative Writing. The Tutor, Stan Hough, later to be Chairman of the District Council, has occupied a variety of roles over many years in the Association, particularly in Falmouth, where he has also been prominent in the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society (The Poly). Himself a professional writer specialising in Science Fiction, Crime and Travel he is ideally qualified both to develop the skills of budding writers and to guide them through the labyrinths of the publishing world. The class has continued for some years, and will continue for some years yet. Oddly, despite its "practical" orientation, the Inspectorate does not seem to have the same objection to Creative Writing that they have to Creative Painting.

Date about 1980: Scene Hayne Corfe Centre, Truro. A day-time class, men and women in equal numbers, markedly younger than those in the "traditional" classes already described for the students are unemployed receiving training that is intended to help them return to the job market. The subject is not, however, what you might expect - they are studying Cornish Botany under a well-known amateur botanist and broadcaster, Keith Spurgin, WEA Tutor-Organiser working with the unemployed on a short term contract. Some of the students are perhaps a little suspicious of the process; others have already discovered abilities in themselves of which they had been unaware. Others will discover other new abilities - in Drama, in Maths perhaps in this context. This new found self-confidence will in itself go a long way to making them employable even in the employment crisis of the early 1980s.

Date about 1988: The scene a Residential Home for seriously handicapped adults. Many students are in wheelchairs all have communication problems but are enjoying playing a range of musical instruments and the tutor is rehearsing them for a public performance. In another room the tutor is listening to students reading poetry they have written during the previous week.

These sketches are impressionistic and, to a degree, subjective. Others might describe the same classes differently. In themselves, however, they indicate some of the changes that have come in the life of the Association during the two decades since 1970.

1970 was, in fact, something of a turning-point. Major changes of personnel in the last years of the 60s and in the early 70s took place. These, though it could not have been predicted at the time, were to persist, with some adjustment of roles, for the next two decades. The character of the partnership with the University changed with the retirement of the redoubtable Fred Harris shortly after the arrival of a new Head of the Extra-Mural Department, Professor Tom Daveney who had been Head of the Adult Education Department at Durham University. The period of overlap between Prof. Daveney's arrival and Fred Harris' departure, though fairly short, was long enough to signal a new degree of involvement of the University with Cornwall, and one with which, to a degree the WEA was to be involved. An immediate expression of that involvement was the establishment of a "University" presence in the small office in the attractive Georgian terrace, Walsingham Place, Truro, and the appointment of an administrator for the Centre, Mrs

Helen Blake. Helen was a happy appointment, for she had a long-standing commitment to Adult Education in general and to the WEA in particular, and a Scot's characteristic love of, and respect for, learning. She was to prove to be counsellor and friend to tutors and students alike for the next 20 years. The North British presence was strengthened a few months later with the appointment of Gordon McCallum as Tutor Organiser. Gordon brought an unusual range of experience to the post. Partially trained as a "vet" at Glasgow University, he admitted to being rather more committed to rock-climbing. The combined skills led, however, to his appointment to the British Antarctic Survey as Mountain Guide and "Dog Man", and subsequently to the staff of an Outward Bound School. Later, however, a mid-life career change led him to do an M.A. in Economics at Leicester University and he subsequently joined the WEA in Cornwall. The appointment of John Hurst as successor to Fred Harris as University Senior Tutor in Cornwall, completed the "team". John had been a WEA Tutor Organiser in the East Midlands for several years before going as Lecturer in the young University of Bradford. He therefore brought a natural sympathy with the WEA, but also a belief in the appropriateness of formal study leading to qualifications which was largely absent from Adult Education at the time.

Simultaneously the Cornwall LEA was gearing itself up for a more active role in Adult Education. The major growth and structural change in LEA activity could not, however, have been foreseen and falls to be outlined later.

The Annual Report for 1969-70 makes interesting reading. Not least in importance is the welcome given to the creation of the Open University. This significant event was not universally welcomed in areas which might have been expected to view it with enthusiasm. On the one hand the "purist" view of Adult Education that it is its own reward and study should not be sullied with such sordid considerations as the search for qualifications was strong in Adult Education. Equally there was the fear, particularly in Universities that "more meant worse" to quote that arch enemy of progress Kingsley Amis. And there was, perhaps, understandably, though nonetheless a little unworthily, the fear that the new University might prove all too effective a competitor. The result has been quite other. Though the O.U.'s structural effect on Adult Education has been comparatively slight - it goes its own way with its own procedures - its impact on assumptions about Adult Education, and on the methods of Adult Education, has been incalculably great and we are all in its debt. It is significant that Gordon McCallum was involved with the O.U. from its earliest days as a part-time tutor, and co-operation has been cordial and continual.

Of more local significance in that report was the marking of the passing of the old "Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes" and its replacement with an Advisory Committee for Adult Education as a sub-Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University. Again the change was viewed with mixed feelings. On the one hand it did, to an extent, signify the close of a "special relationship"; on the other it provided a more flexible structure for dialogue linked directly with the decision making structure of the University. Its long term effects were probably healthy for both partners, though as is often the case, the attainment of health was not achieved without some positive, and strenuous, re-adjustment on both sides.

One further theme, signalled in Gordon McCallum's first report, was to be reverted to with increasing frequency, and not a little distress in subsequent years - the nature of the relationship between the professional staff and the members in a movement which is by its nature and definition a voluntary movement, coupled with an often reiterated emphasis on the need for greater involvement in decision-making by the members. As Government becomes more interventionist over the next two decades, increasingly pressing the WEA to a more positive involvement with the disadvantaged, this tension is to become more acute with every passing year.

During the early years of the 70s work was continuing on the much discussed and heralded Russell Report. This worthy (and lengthy) document finally saw the light of day in 1972. To many in Adult Education it did not address the real problems. It had little to say about the inter-relationships of the various (and sometimes competing) providers. It did not address itself to the educationally damaging and artificial distinction between "thinking" and "doing" which was built into the "Responsible Body" regulations under which the WEA (and the Universities) were required to work if they were to qualify for grant aid. Notice has already been taken of the manner in which these regulations were applied to restrict the freedom of tutors to teach their subject in the manner they thought best as in the case of Mr Andrews' Art History class. Nor did it seriously address the question of certification, credit equivalence, and opportunities for educational progression for Adult students. It did, however, contain recommendations which were to prove both formative and controversial for the WEA - and incidentally, over a period of time to undermine the artificialities of the R.B. regulations and to point towards the need for diverse pathways in educational opportunities for adults. The requirement imposed by Russell, and subsequently confirmed by the D.E.S. to devote a third of its programme to work with educationally underprivileged and culturally deprived, though entirely consistent with the aims of the Association, as indicated by Tawney (see above) was, however to pose major problems. It is a well-known characteristic of Governments to impose ends without willing the means, and this category of work proved no exception to this pattern. Everyone in Adult Education knows that work in these areas is difficult, often discouraging, and immensely demanding of staff time, and hence expensive. It says much for the ingenuity and sheer hard work of the professional staff that, faced with the inconsistencies of Government policy and the vagaries of funding, such excellent results have been produced. It remains, however, an area in which the professional staff have to take a major role - thus exacerbating the professional/volunteer divide. The question will recur increasingly forcibly as the even more radical restructuring of the early 90s comes to take shape.

Meanwhile the familiar patterns of work continue and evolve. Serious and demanding work, one of Tawney's pillars of the life of the Association - continue despite the rarified activities of politicians (and educationalists).

A fine example of this was the production by the Lizard group of the WEA of a scholarly and imaginatively presented book on the Natural History of the Lizard under the supervision of that remarkable duo Dr Frank and Mrs Stella Turk. Much of the story of Adult Education in Cornwall could be told through a biography of Frank and Stella, and it would be a remarkable testimony to the persistence and vital value of "good learning" in a rural County with limited public resources for scholarship. Anecdotes of Frank teaching himself Literary Mongolian on the old North Cornwall railway (before Dr. Beeching decreed its demise) on his way back from classes "up North" typify a life devoted to scholarship. Similar work was to proceed from the Looe group, also supervised by Stella Turk, and later from the groups that gathered around the University's dedicated Local History Tutor, Mrs Veronica Chesher.

The middle of the decade when all these good things were happening saw the death of several figures who had played prominent roles in the Association's life. The death of E.W.Godden of Fowey, District Treasurer for 30 years and Secretary of the Fowey Branch for more than 50 years seemed to mark another era ending, as did the passing of Phyll Angove, WEA and later University Local History Tutor. Again Phyll's anecdotes gave a "feel" of Adult Education in Cornwall in the way a dry account can not - not least of the extra-ordinary "do-it-yourself" Weekend Schools at Newquay. Phyll's range of friendships covered a wide range of Cornish cultural life - not least her long intimacy with that lovable Cornish writer, Anne Treneer, whose "School House in the Wind" is for many the most attractive portrait of Cornish life early this century. Phyll's death was followed a year later by that of Gladys Harris, formerly Gladys Malbon. Gladys had come to East Cornwall to join the staff of the Extra-Mural Department after a distinguished career in North Staffs, where she had been, for a time during the war years, District Secretary of the WEA and had been closely associated with the early days of Keele University, that major product of post-war educational idealism. She married Fred Harris, and became less active in teaching but her virtues as a tutor are still spoken of by older students in Looe and Liskeard and Callington.

Of perennial concern to the WEA is the basis - and level - of the D.E.S. grant. A major change to this basis came in 1976. Some aspects of it were welcome, especially the ability to use grants for support of District administration as well as for teaching costs. It did, however, have one flaw, which in the short term, proved damaging - it assumed the continuance of LEA grant support at the same level with appropriate inflation proofing. In the light however of the pressure on Local Authorities in the stormy years of the late 1970s this was a guarantee that Devon County Council, and to a lesser extent Cornwall C.C. found it hard to give. The immediate result was a 'nose-dive' to use the District Secretary's words in the Annual Report for 1977-78 in the level of classes provided. After the 'high' of 1976 the Cornwall programme plummeted to its lowest level since 1948, significantly below the other low-water mark of

1970. Already however signs of new directions were appearing, even in such an adverse, temporary climate, not least as the Association's understanding of effective ways of acting in the 'educational priority' areas grew. The previous year had seen the establishment of the first classes for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, with a modest degree of ear-marked County Council support. The need for - and educational opportunity offered by - work in the area of Preparation for Retirement was becoming clear and sources of employer funding were being opened up. Similarly unemployment - and the wide range of human needs associated with it - was beginning its long upward curve which was to continue remorselessly long into the Thatcher years of the 80s. The Report for 1977-78 simultaneously with recording the 'nose-dive' and its causes, defines in a most clear sighted manner, the educational needs of the unemployed, especially the basic 'Life-skills' needed not merely to live with unemployment but to equip the unemployed to move back into the world of work. This area of activity was to take the Association far beyond the traditional "Liberal Studies" classes that had been the hall-mark of its activities.

The mid and later 1970s had seen other developments that were to affect the WEA in the County. The LEA's commitment to Adult Education had continued to grow, and when Andy Morgan was promoted to the post of Assistant Secretary in the Schools division of the County Council and Miss Sheila Richards was appointed, three important developments ensued. The first was, undoubtedly a marked upturn in the professionalism of the service through the establishment of a training programme for part-time tutors. Secondly the increasing demands being placed on the service as its profile was raised made it impossible for it to be staffed by the army of underpaid and overworked part-time Adult Principals - almost all of them school teachers or College lecturers doing the job in addition to or in an odd hour released from their teaching. The system of professional Area Principals was established which remains expanded and modified in detail to the time of writing. Thirdly there was a marked expansion of the programme provided by the LEA accompanied by a striking diversification in the subjects offered. An examination of courses offered in Adult Education centre programmes over the last 15 years would provide on the one hand an interesting index of changing fashions in leisure time use. On the other it would demonstrate the increasing importance of courses for qualifications - whether O and A levels, or courses validated by RSA or City and Guilds. Inevitably with such an expansionist programme there were dangers of the 'invasion' by the LEA of areas traditionally provided by the Responsible Bodies. Conversely there was a fear among the LEA Principals that the progressive relaxation of the Responsible Body funding rules referred to earlier would lead to invasion of their 'territory' by the WEA and the Extra-Mural Department. It cannot be said that futile and mutually self-defeating competition has not taken place, but structures were created for consultation and these have, on the whole, worked well. moreover, as with the creation of the O.U., fears of competition for a limited 'pool' of students have largely proved groundless and increasing opportunity seems to have stimulated the participation of an increasing number of students. This is not to imply that the sky is the limit, nor that sensible co-operation is not vital. It is to imply that, with careful structures of planning in the County the educational experience, in its broadest sense, can be made available to a steadily widening body of participants, who may not simply be WEA, or University or LEA students, but who may draw , from time to time on the activities and experience of all the providers. Similarly as a new area of activity opens up through the University of the Third Age it can be anticipated that this will provide not merely competition, but a new pool of students who, from time to time make use of the already available channels of provision.

Meanwhile, concurrently with the mushrooming of the LEA programme a more limited development, but one of considerable significance for the WEA and thus for Adult Education in the County generally, was taking place within the Extra-Mural Department; the first tentative steps towards a programme of award-bearing courses validated by the University itself. This programme has not been without its problems - particularly those associated with the need to establish the Certificates as valid for entry purposes and remission of study times both within the University itself and with other academic bodies, not least the O.U. Many students have, of course, valued the discipline of studying for a preliminary University qualification for its own sake and many have gone on both to the O.U. and to the College of St. Mark and St. John, and increasingly to the Polytechnic S.W. It probably remains true however, that the Certificates for which there is the most continuing demand are those that have a clear professional relevance, most notably in Theology, which is 'core curriculum' for the Regional Ordination Training Course and in Counselling Studies, which is widely used for in-service training by the caring professions. The development was viewed with suspicion both within the University itself and within the WEA. And it has to be recorded that the University has still not grasped the nettle of constructing a part-time Degree structure for its region. The recognition however of the right of students for accreditation for work undertaken is now almost universal and its presence in the new District Development Plan is significant. None of this is to imply, of course, that the notion of the validity of education purely for self enrichment, a genuine response to the richness and variety of the created world and of human experience, is no longer recognised. Of course it is; and it must remain central to the WEA's witness in a bleak age. It is, however, to recognise that there are different paths for different people at different times, and the WEA can only be richer for embracing that awareness wholeheartedly.

As the Association approached the end of the decade a further major change in personnel took place. Arthur Maddison, who had been District Secretary for 18 years, retired, and took with him Mrs Maddison who had been the District's skilful accountant for much of that time. Arthur clearly had considerable affection for Cornwall and was assiduous in his attendance at the Cornwall Joint Committee in County Hall where he vigorously kept the needs of the WEA before the members of the County Council present. Arthur's retirement was preceded by the award of the Honorary Degree of M.A. by the O.U. - a warm tribute to his service to Adult Education over nearly two decades. His successor was another WEA man in the traditional mould. Charles Butler came via the Agricultural Workers' Union to the WEA, first as class member, and then as Organiser for Berkshire. He was for a number of years District Secretary, in the Berks, Bucks and Oxon District of the WEA and for a brief time worked in the national office of the WEA before coming to the S.W. for the last decade of his career. He was fortunate to arrive at a time when the Association was successfully climbing from the trough of 1977-78 both academically and financially. He took over an Association in good heart for the challenge of the 1980s.

An interesting index to the manner in which the WEA in the S.W. has responded to the varied stresses - and opportunities - presented to the WEA during the "Thatcher Years" of the 80s might be to look at the personnel and subject matter of the District Council. Both present a striking mingling of tradition and change. The District Secretary appointed in 1979 is still there - but as an elected member no longer as District Secretary, having retired, full of wisdom, and of an appropriate number of years in the summer of 1989. The new District Secretary marks a striking break with tradition. Elizabeth Weightman not only is the first female District Secretary in the S.W. but also does not come from a typical WEA background - unlike her predecessors in the post - but via successful Local Authority experience. She was first a teacher, subsequently an Adult Education Principal in the in the Restormel area of Cornwall, and thereafter had a period of secondment to the National Further Education Unit. This gave her an insight into the rapidly developing national scene in post-16 education. It is this national experience which is probably more significant than the former: for there can never have been a time when the Association was more acutely aware of the vital impact on it of national policies. Again the composition of the Council is strikingly similar in character to that familiar over the years - of well-read, careful-thinking people who believe in education as both a basic right and an essential good and who foster it through promoting and attending classes. Yet, even here, there are subtle changes. Branches may no longer represent a single identified community, but an area - witness the valuable North Cornwall Branch which operates in that thinly populated but characterful tract between Camelford and the Devon border, taking in Bude en route. Or again an area of activity may be represented - be it Trade Union or Women's Studies.

Tradition remains, however, still strong both in some appointments made and in some subjects under discussion. A 'happy' traditional appointment was made when Tony Herr, who had been an active and effective Branch Secretary in North Cornwall, became Tutor-Organiser for North Cornwall and North Devon in April 1986. Tony had a background as a highly skilled craftsman/engineer with such firms as Boeing and subsequently as a teacher in the rapidly developing area of Craft, Design and Technology. His appointment put the growing work in North Cornwall on an even firmer footing. Even more traditional, however, are some of the subjects under discussion. The level of class fees - and, even more contentiously, the level and rationale of reduced class fees, are discussed as lengthily and inconclusively as at any time in the last three decades. Yet over-shadowing these necessary, though familiar, topics, there are more major and more threatening issues. Even the warmest admirers of the "Baker" education legislation would not argue that Adult Education and its welfare and development were central to its concerns. Indeed the effects of the legislation's central clauses - the Local Financial Managements accorded to schools through delegated budgets, and the ability of Schools above a certain size to "opt out" of Local Authority control - both have a potentially damaging effect on the establishment of consistent patterns of Adult Education, and hence on the relationship between the WEA (and the University Department) and the Local Authority . It is a strong indicator of the close relationship between the Association and the Cornwall authority that much has been done by the LEA to mitigate the more obvious ways in which the work of the Association could have been damaged. Whether this will survive the sustained attacks by Government on local authority autonomy and finance remains to be seen; but the extent of good will and common purpose is very clear.

We have already seen how "concern for the disadvantaged" (however defined) was enjoined on the WEA by the Russell Report, and has remained an area of activity - and discussion - ever since. The concern was, literally, visible at the Spring 1990 meeting of the Cornwall

Federation in the presence not merely of audio-loops for the hearing impaired, but also of a "signing" interpreter, whose skill proved of such fascination as to provide a rival attraction to the discourse of the distinguished visiting speaker, Alan Tuckett, Director of N.I.A.C.E. The work with those with various forms of disability - not merely hearing impairment, but those with Down's Syndrome - and with the elderly has been an admirable feature of the Association's work in the County, and one which has attracted the idealism inherent in the Branch members. Yet it is potentially financially damaging - the work, by its very nature, needs to be undertaken in small groups; yet, it is a central feature of the DES payment by results policy that success is measured in student numbers and in Effective Student Hours. This dreaded formula appears in the statistics for the first time in the Report of 1984/85. It will readily be seen that work with the disadvantaged does not lead to large cheques from the DES. It is here that an additional irony appears. The adaptability of the WEA in the S.W. has lead it to forge effective links with other bodies - in this case both Local Authority Social Service Departments and with the Area Health Authority, who have provided valuable and necessary funding. Yet these, in turn, are subject to the constant pressures for cost effectiveness and reduced expenditure; so even that very ingenuity and adaptability is itself vulnerable to inherent flaws in national thinking and policies totally outside the Association's control.

An area of co-operation which was, however, more controversial was that established with the Manpower Services Commission. Some WEA Districts shunned work with the MSC, fearing to be tarnished by contact with the mammon of unrighteousness represented by a Government Training Initiative. There were also fears that the MSC would place severe restrictions on the conduct of courses which it sponsored which might constitute an infringement of academic freedom. Both fears proved unjustified. In fact a significant number of students recovered personal confidence and found new life skills and directions through the WEA's involvement ensuring a humane and liberal approach to retraining that might have been absent if the training had been in the hands of a body less committed to genuine educational values. The enterprise was not without hazards - for the level of funding was unpredictable from year to year. Nevertheless, in the event, the Association's act of faith paid off and the MSC connection was to prove fruitful in the late 80's. And it also provided a new expression of Tawney's first "pillar" of the WEA, its commitment to the working-class; though that term needs to be seen in a light different to that in which Tawney would have conceived.

The decade has seen other interesting features. Much effort was exerted early in the decade to develop links with, and skills appropriate to, local Broadcasting. Training courses in using Radio and TV were arranged for tutors and officers, and experiments were carried out with T SW. Yet the results are not unduly visible. Radio Cornwall shows a good deal of interest in informal education, but very little in formal and continuing activity. There is a sense here of an opportunity lost. It cannot be accidental, however, that the best informal education in the context of Radio Cornwall, is carried out by a WEA Tutor in the shape of Keith Spurgin's regular broadcasts on Natural History topics. Similarly and appropriately, Radio Cornwall has provided, on a limited scale, Cornish language features to cater for the growing interest in the language. Yet one feels if such things can be done successfully there must be opportunities for educational activity on a wider scale. Radio Cornwall is, of course, run on a shoe-string; but equally the ethos of the station is essentially populist, and formal educational activity might not seem a high priority for the Station Managers and consultative committee.

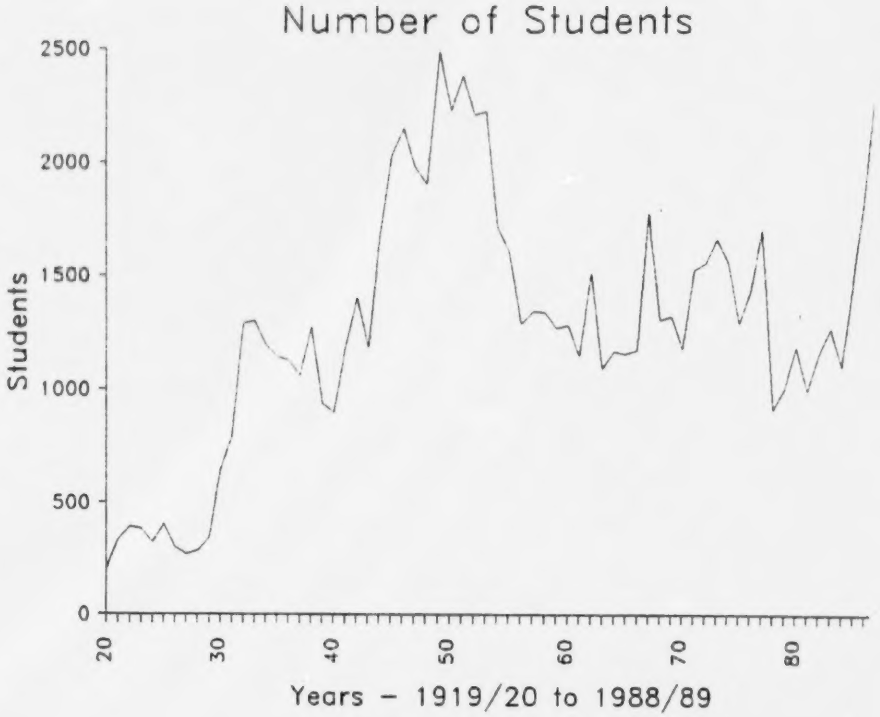
Relationships with the University have also developed interestingly. Formal co-operation in class provision has steadily diminished ... yet on a personal level relationships remain close and cordial. In 1984 the University was able to establish a small Adult Education Centre in Truro when it purchased the detached house near both County Hall and the Railway Station, Hayne Corfe. The building had acquired some notoriety when its elderly former occupant had instructed in her will that it be demolished. Considerable local controversy ensued, and the direction was eventually quashed at the request of the executors on a legal technicality. Shortly after, the University purchased the building and has frequently extended hospitality to the WEA, some of the Restart work, for instance having taken place there, as well as training and pre-retirement courses. Though already too small for some activities which would be appropriate to it - particularly the larger one-day events - it is a pleasant and welcoming environment. Administrative direction has passed from John Hurst, first to Roger Burrows and subsequently to Richard McGrady, though the former remains active both in the Department and in the County Council Education Committee. Helen Blake continues to provide a warm and supportive presence and a valued link between the Association and the University, reinforced by the role of John Hurst as President of the Association. Both have been closely associated with the revived and strengthened Cornwall Federation.

The Local Authority, too is attempting to establish structures in the aftermath of the Baker Bill which will enable co-operation to continue and develop. They have responded readily to the challenge to enhance funding through their share of the ESG monies made available by the DES under the new funding arrangements, and a place is assured for the Association in the new consultative structures, though there is a sense that this should not be confined to the professional level as it currently is.

The Association continues then to provide a stable, yet responsive structure in an era of almost insanely rapid change. There is nervousness as we move into the 1990s with new funding structures; but also a sense that, because the WEA springs from a deep conviction about the vital role of education in a "free" society it will survive.

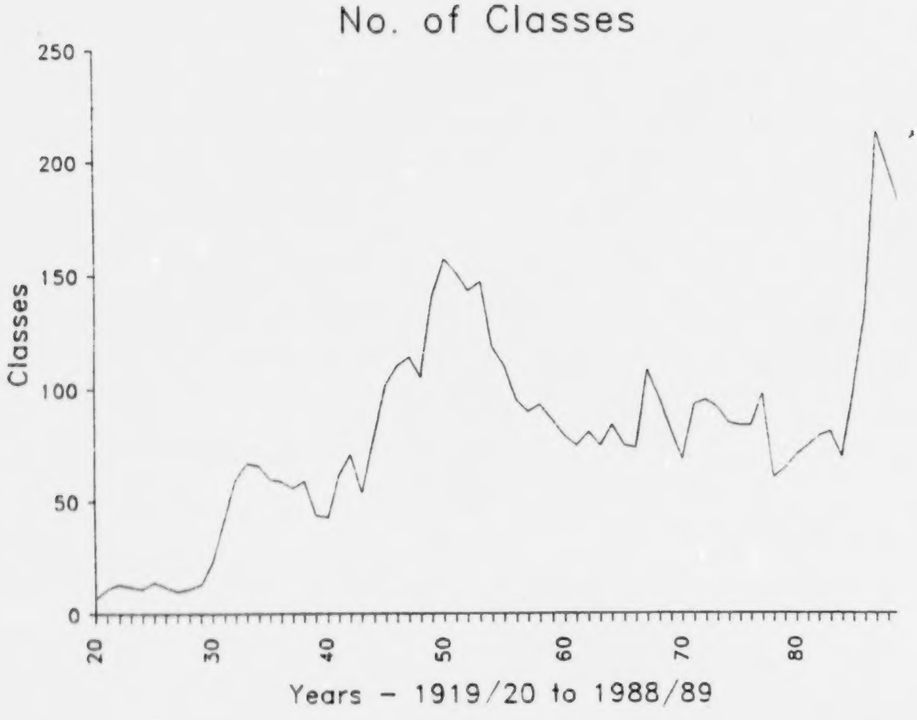
## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: NUMBER OF STUDENTS

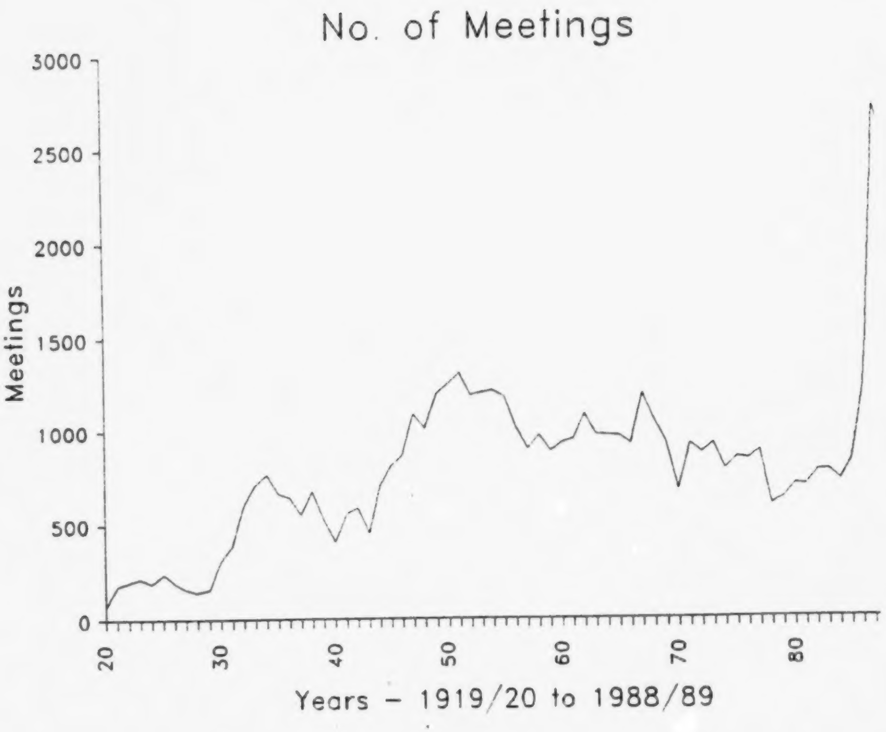


# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 2: NUMBER OF CLASSES



## APPENDIX 3: NUMBER OF MEETINGS



The time is the 1930s, the place Bodmin Road railway station: Engine driver Cyril Stevens jumps down from the footplate and runs across to the upline train to hand his weekly essay to his tutor who is travelling to a class. This is the love of learning and the Workers Educational Association in action.

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